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MONEY TALKS
HOW YOUR WALLET CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

20Q KEHLANI
ON GENDER, MUSIC & BEING A MOM

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Graphic Designer **Koketso Moganetsi**

Fashion Editor **Lexie Robb**

Grooming Editor **Greg Forbes**

Gaming Editor **Andre Coetzer**

Tech Editor **Peter Wolff**

Illustrations **Toon53 Productions**

Motoring Editor **John Page**

Senior Photo Editor **Luba V Nel**

ADVERTISING SALES **pieter@dhsmedia.co.za**

for more information

PHONE: +27 10 006 0051
MAIL: PO Box 71450, Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2021
ADDRESS: First Floor Block 6 Fourways Office Park, Cnr Roos Street & Fourways Boulevard, 2191
EMAIL: info@dhsmedia.co.za
WEB: www.playboymagdenmark.com
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/PlayBDenmark
INSTAGRAM: playboymag_denmark

PLAYBOY INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING
Allison Kopcha, Chief Business Development & Licensing
Hazel Thomson, Senior Director, International Licensing

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CONTENTS

06 **MONEY TALKS**
How your wallet can change the world

08 **SEX ACTIVIST STOYA**
The leader porn needs now!

20 **ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE**
Contemporary artists reimagine sexuality in art

28 **20Q: KEHLANI**
On gender, music & being a mom

38 **NOVELIST PAUL BEATTY**
Is making room for writers of color

40 **MEDIA WUNDERKIND NOOR TAGOURI**
Makes a forceful case for modesty

52 **FRONTWOMAN LAURA JANE GRACE**
The punk rocker fights for what she believes in

54 **ICONOCLAST JASON DILL**
Returning skateboarding to its roots

56 **INDIE DEVELOPER SEAN MURRAY**
Boldly goes where no gamer has gone before

68 **TELLING THE TRUTH**
We get candid with Jemele Hill

86 **DOPE TUTOR**
Where to buy black-owned weed

88 **DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**
Why journalists aren't expendable

92 **INSIDE TIM & ERIC**
Awesome Show, Great Job

12 **PICTORIAL**
KIKI D'AIRE

42 **ON THE COVER**
KAY MANUEL

60 **PICTORIAL**
KINDLY MYERS

78 **PICTORIAL**
LARISSA SUMPANI

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PLAYBOY

Changing *the* World With Your *Wallet*

The way we spend our money is a daily weapon for reform. Here, America's most renowned consumer advocate makes the case for direct citizen action

BY **RALPH NADER**

Speaking before college audiences, I often ask, “How many of you have never been to a McDonald’s or a Walmart?” No hands go up—except mine. I explain that I’ve never given my consumer dollars to McDonald’s because of its deadly menu of fat, sugar and salt that has increased youth obesity for two generations. I’ve similarly refused to give my money to Walmart because of its low wages and unfair competitive practices that crush small businesses.

If you’re concerned about the impact your money has on the world after it leaves your pocket, you need to define your consumer preferences. In an internet age it’s easy to research brands to see if you agree with their positions on political candidates and their stands on diversity and nondiscrimination. But rarely do enough consumers vote with their dollars to send a clear and convincing message to companies that need to change.

Why? First, it can be difficult. Wells Fargo, the regulation-resisting bank with about 5,800 branches, was finally exposed after two recent crimes: Over the course of 2016 and 2017 it was discovered that the financial institution had created up to 3.5 million fake accounts and made unnecessary auto-insurance purchases for more than 800,000 unknowing customers. The media reported the details of these crimes extensively. The bank had to pay millions of dollars in restitution and fines, regulators put a temporary moratorium on its capital expansion, and the bosses stepped down, ample pay packages in hand. But what the bank’s directors feared most was loss of customers and an enduring stock-price collapse. That didn’t happen—because as everybody knows, switching banks is complicated, inconvenient and time-consuming.

Second, consumers may have limited options. If you have a small income or live in a rural area with few if any alternatives to Walmart and Amazon, it’s difficult to leverage your consumer dollars for better business practices.

And then there are the subtler methods practiced by tech giants such as Facebook and Google. When a company gives you something for free, you become the product. Information about your private life is central to the business model of these giant internet companies. You’re unlikely to simply say “I want out” of your social networks after learning that Facebook has shared your personal data with everyone who wants it anywhere in the world. But when you click “accept” on those encyclopedic terms and conditions, you lose control of your online privacy, and your data profile grows by the day.

Our government, heavily lobbied by Silicon Valley, will not require Facebook to provide an opt-in button. To opt out from Facebook and its ilk requires willpower. When news broke that the social network had allowed unsavory companies to obtain information about tens of millions of its customers, hundreds of thousands of them closed their accounts. This protest hardly made a dent. Facebook still has more than 2 billion users worldwide, including more than half the U.S. population. But Mr. Zuckerberg definitely felt the cautionary tremors.

Another difficulty is presented by the right-wing and very politically active Koch brothers. Together they’re worth more than R1,850.00 billion, mainly from giant oil, gas and chemical enterprises. They lobby for corporation-friendly judges and against even minimal taxation. But they have no recognizable logo or brand presence at the retail level.

What can you do? First, educate yourself. It’s easy to find out which companies belong to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or other trade associations that push for weaker environmental standards, higher drug prices, more tax escapes for big businesses or tort restrictions that weaken access to our courts by wrongfully injured persons. This will expose companies with no visible consumer brand or identity.

"Even a small portion of that dollar power could be used to advance our country’s health, safety and moral strength."

Sleeping Giants is a Twitter account that informs advertisers of consumers’ disdain for companies or news sites that fail to oppose bigotry, racism, sexism and hate-mongering. This public outing of abusers has caused thousands of companies to cancel their advertising contracts for fear of being accused of supporting media outlets or personalities—such as Fox’s Bill O’Reilly—whose behavior contradicts customer values or corporate policies. This collateral pressure works (though at times, like all mass movements, it can go to extremes).

You can be a “pick and choose” consumer based on your political values without sacrificing a good deal. I know people who won’t buy gas from ExxonMobil because of the company’s long-standing cover-up of and resistance to regulations dealing with climate disinformation. Years ago, consumers troubled by Philip Morris’s control of congressional politicians and promotion of smoking refused to purchase products from the company’s food subsidiaries. And when it comes to environmental malefactors like the Koch brothers, consumers can penalize them—and help themselves and the planet at the same time—by practicing energy conservation. Solar panels and products made from renewable resources are good places to start.

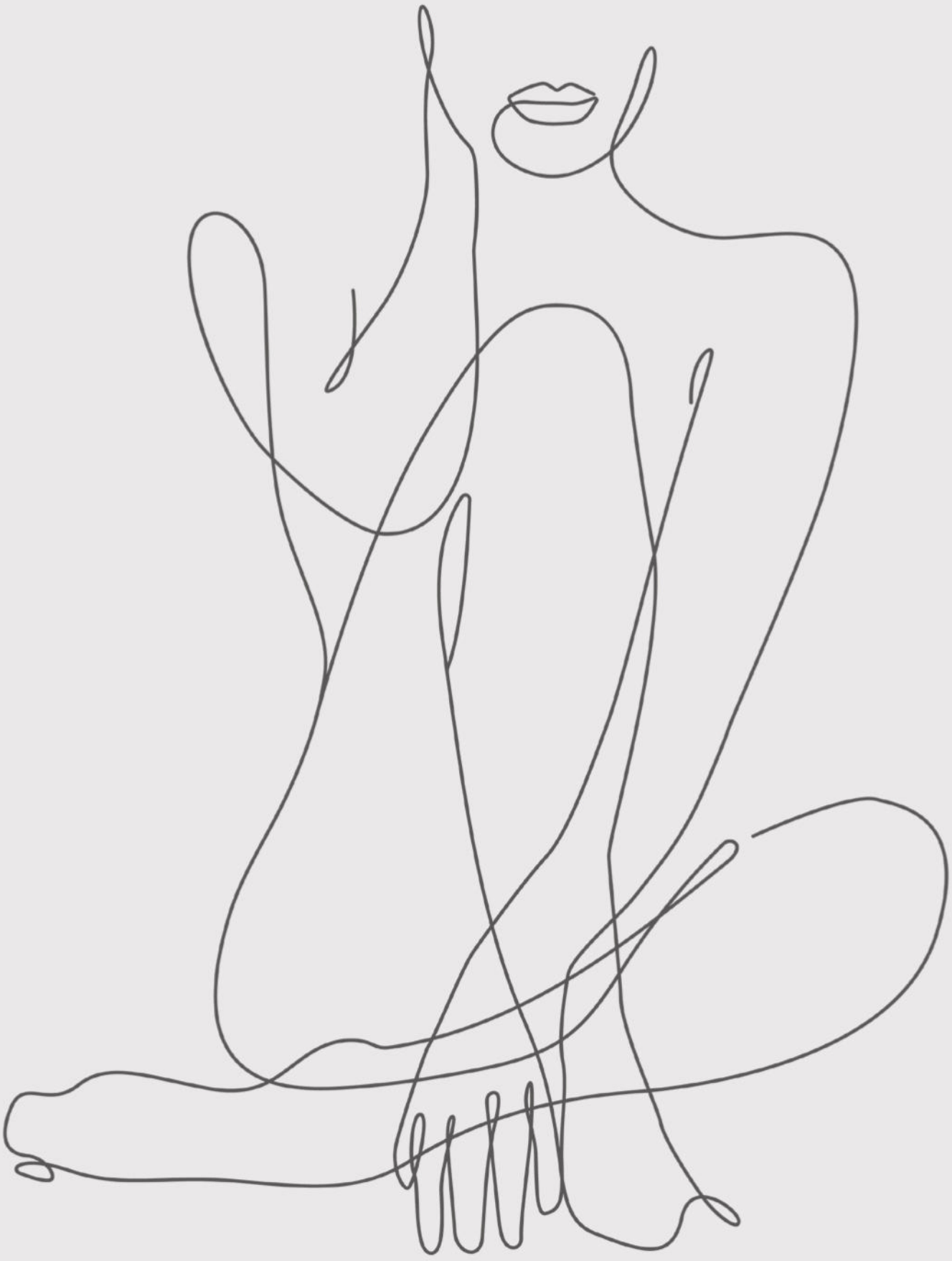
However, it’s worth adding that consumers don’t have to open their wallets for corporations to change practices. Notice how many powerful executives were immediately dismissed after facing credible accusations of sexual harassment, assault and rape. Companies ranging from Fox News to Morgan Stanley couldn’t ignore the waves of condemnation from consumers, workers and citizen action groups. Reporting by the mass media helped accelerate the process.

Remember, consumer spending accounts for more than two thirds of our economy. Even a small portion of that dollar power could be used to advance our country’s health, safety and moral strength. Protest with your spending choices.

Sex Activist Stoya Is the Leader Porn Needs Now

Co-founder of the genre-defying porn site TrenchcoatX, activist and sex star Stoya talks to Playboy about love, beauty and dealing with the haters

BY **MOLLY CRABAPPLE** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**



It's hard to capture an old friend in one anecdote, but I'll try. The time is two a.m., and Stoya and I are smoking outside an East Village bar. A mink hangs from her shoulders. The streetlights catch her feline cheekbones like a kiss. Stoya tells me about the mid–19th century prima ballerina Emma Livry. In an era when dancers routinely caught fire from stage lights, Livry refused to destroy the ethereality of her art by soaking her tutu in flame retardant. When she died of burns, she had no regrets. Stoya notes that panic about safety often focuses on the bodies, and the choices, of young women. She wonders why no one thought to move the lights.

This moment hints at Stoya's ferocious mix of glamour, toughness and nerdery. A classically trained ballerina until an injury in her mid-teens ruined her prospects, Stoya became a porn star—and I use the word star in the sense that applies to Garbo. She has written for The New York Times, starred in a Serbian sci-fi film (the upcoming Ederlezi Rising) and trained as an aerialist in Moscow. She has also moved into entrepreneurship, co-founding the genre-defying porn site TrenchcoatX.

When one of the biggest porn studios in the country treated her with disrespect, she chose to work as a waitress rather than kowtow. No matter what she does, Stoya exudes a fierce, hard-won sense of freedom.

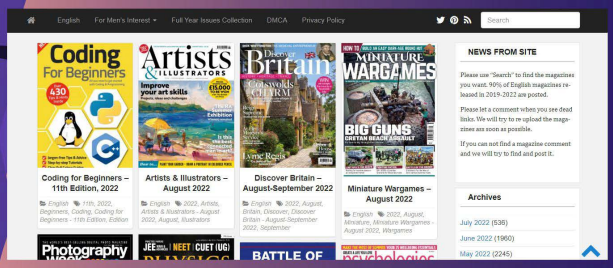
PLAYBOY: What challenges do you face every day in the course of your work?
STOYA: What day is it, because just about every day the challenge is different. That's the nature of challenge. This month, my big challenge is learning how to deal with the bureaucratic and office end of running a porn production company and website. This time last year, my challenge was, "Oh fuck, our first programmer bailed on us, and the new one doesn't have time to figure out how the first one was doing it, so how am I going to learn enough HTML to get my shit together?"
PLAYBOY: How do you balance your art, your ethical/political ideals and the grind of running a business?
STOYA: Pessimism time: The question for me there is less about how I hope to balance those, and more, "Is it possible to have a financially viable business at an increasingly large scale while doing things in the way that seems most right?"
PLAYBOY: How do you deal with backlash?
STOYA: Which backlash? The backlash from people from whatever extremist religion—underline italics bold, it's not the Christians, not the Muslims, it's whichever religion's gone crazypants off the rails—who think some book written however the fuck long ago that said people who have sex in whatever proscribed way aren't people? Is it the backlash from feminists who say I'm a traitor to women? Or from other feminists who want to put sex in a box where its all sunshine and daisies and and where all porn is—barf—empowering? Is it the backlash from the people who have no problems with porn but think it's disgusting that I smoke cigarettes? I just try not to engage. The only times I can't avoid engaging with it are when there's a well-intentioned fan who thinks "fuck the haters" is a rallying cry, or when some journalist throws the worst shit people say about you in your face.
PLAYBOY: I want to talk about beauty—and I mean beauty in the larger sense, not in the sense used to sell face cream.**
STOYA: Beauty is the thing that makes it worth it. It's what makes you drag your ass out of bed in the morning. It's what makes you continue to respond to the internal question, Why bother?
PLAYBOY: Your professional name, Stoya, is a tribute to your Serbian grandmother, and you recently starred in Ederlezi Rising, a Serbian sci-fi romance. What does your Serbian heritage mean to you?
STOYA: There's a very specific mix of realism and hope that I always saw in my grandmother and that I see in Serbia. Pragmatism might be a more precise word than realism. In the West, speicially the English speaking West, we have so many pompous bags of air in suits. We see them go on television or on Twitter, and I've sat across from some of them in their offices. They promise people the most outlandish things. Anyone looking rationally at what they have to work with knows they're full of shit. They're as self-aggrandizing and empty as the Wizard of Oz. My grandmother makes amazing things with no resources. You know those Styrofoam trays that meat comes in? My grandmother would build whole landscapes from those trays. Landscapes, from actual trash. That's looking at what is actually there, which is trash, and transforming it with some paint and some effort and a shit-ton of creativity. Everyone who worked on Ederlezi Rising in Serbia is like that. I've been in pornos with budgets bigger than Ederlezi Rising has, and it's beautiful.
PLAYBOY: How has training as a ballerina affected your life?
STOYA: It gave me a near suicidal work ethic. It gave me a very interesting relationship to physical sensations of pain—by this I mean complex and multilayered. For people who took a lot of dance instruction in youth, and went into sex or sex-work-adjacent work, it seems pretty common to have a multifaceted masochism that relates to lived experience in a dance studio. Of course, ballet gives one a well-practiced awareness of one's body that comes in super handy when one is in front of camera.
PLAYBOY: One of the things I've always seen and admired in you is this fierce, hard-won sense of freedom. I'd love to hear you riff on what freedom means to you.
STOYA: First we have to acknowledge capitalism. Money exerts behavioral control in so many ways; that's the frontline of behavioral control in the US. You spend your childhood hearing you have to do this and that to get into a good college, to get a degree to get a good job and buy shit. It's not even presented as "buy shit" but as having things integral to adulthood, to fulfilling the promise of the American dream, like a very large house that costs a lot to keep warm in the winter. That's broken in me. I don't have that button. I don't have the "how will you have that lifestyle" button. I just sort of don't care. Which could work very much against me in the context of how to run a business, but it works in the context of being happy with the work I'm doing and the conditions I'm doing it in, and its driven me to a point where the only dudes in suits I have to answer to are VISA, MasterCard and the IRS

"Beauty is the thing that makes it worth it. It's what makes you continue to respond to the question, Why bother?"

Kiki D'Aire

Instagram **@kikidaire_**

Photography by **Miles Long | @mileslong4real**



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Baby Girl

Model journey My model journey started in Memphis, TN in approximately 1996. I was working as a dancer in one of the local strip clubs and kept seeing featured entertainers come through. I decided I wanted to do the same thing and collect a paycheck from the club instead of just working for tips. I had already had a bit of a taste of shooting a movie since the majority of The People vs Larry Flynt was shot in my hometown. I got the call to audition for Courtney Love and Milos Forman to decide which Hustler club dancer I'd play as well as to shoot photos for the set decorators to use. The photoshoot was a lot of fun and shot by a real Hustler photographer! Once I decided to become a feature, I got hooked up with an agent and started doing nude beauty pageants and actual magazine work. My first title was Miss Nude French Riviera 1997 and my first magazine layout was soon booked. I discovered that while fun, the pageants were a big expense though I did get to shoot with people like the famed Bunny Yeager, and the magazines weren't pushing my fee up. By that time, I realized that doing porn was the quickest way to drive my fees higher so I made the decision to go for it. I went to LA and began my foray into the world of adult film. I was nervous at first but found that I really enjoyed doing features with scripts and I loved working on the various shows that Playboy TV did like Sex Court. Playboy radio was always a lot of fun too.

3 must-dos for relaxation My best friends live extremely close and we are constantly doing things together like camping or going to comedy shows. The time spent with them helps keep me grounded and we regularly schedule things way in advance to make sure we get in that time together. Another thing that helps keep my head together is finding ways to include my partner in what I'm doing. He loves being on set when I'm shooting for myself both as a spectator and participant. I enjoy him expressing himself sexually as well and find that playing together or separately only helps keep our bond strong. Lastly, our 4 dogs are an endless source of laughter and cuddles. There is nothing as relaxing as being home with my partner and the fur babies! It definitely helps to have creatures that depend on us for their well-being as far as priorities go.

What does it mean It matters immensely given the negative stereotypes that persist in society. No, I'm not forced to do anything. No, I don't hate my job. No, I don't do what I do because of abuse. I do what I do because I'm happy with my life. I went to college, I have a degree. I'd lose my mind if I had to work in corporate America, it's just not for me which doesn't mean I can't do it. I can, I just don't want to. It takes a lot of guts to live life on your own terms, strength in yourself and who you are, is essential when living in what could be considered an alternative lifestyle. Small-minded people are everywhere and they aren't always nice, adversity is the norm because they don't understand what we do. I've survived and thrived in the adult business for over 20 years at this point, definitely not an easy feat. In a landscape that often chews people up and spits them out, I'm still here with a smile on my face and plenty of positive things to say. If that doesn't embody strength, intelligence, and ambition...well, I don't know what does.

Misconceptions I do are very much a job and are very regulated. I get tested for a dozen stis every two weeks as do my partners, and while sometimes I choose my partners, other times I work with who I'm booked with. It's important to make my partner look good while I look like I'm having an amazing time even if I'm not. Before we shoot a scene there are extensive conversations about dos and don'ts, positions, and confirmation that no one is under the influence of drugs/alcohol and is there of their own free will. A party it definitely is not and everyone has a common goal which is to get the best content possible as quickly as possible. Speaking of drugs and alcohol, while most people think that is stuff is readily available 24/7 on set, it isn't. There are a large number of completely sober people in the business and those things are not tolerated on set at all. It's a huge liability. Freedom of self-expression- obviously, working on The People vs Larry Flynt was an experience but also it made me think about the people who fought for our right to make adult entertainment. Larry was the only person to go to jail in the early days and it's important to remember those who paid hefty fines and spent time behind bars while paving the way for us to do what we do. I truly believe that adult entertainment can have a very positive effect when used as an aid to a healthy sex life. Sex is part of the human experience and should be celebrated. Let those fantasies out and play in

a safe, sane, consensual way! Humans need the release that comes with an orgasm.

Personal experience as an influencer Social media is so crazy to me...it's completely changed the way we do so many things. I can follow all types of reviewers and take the guesswork out of picking a new restaurant or getting reviews about any other type of business! It's pretty awesome. The other thing I like is being able to use my social media to get the word out about small businesses or causes that I support.

3 things I can't go without daily My partner makes the best coffee and I have to have it in the morning. The various supplements not only make me feel better but keep me healthier since I don't have a lot of time to get sick. Laughter! Lots and lots of laughter! DMs- I'm actually happy that I don't get a ton of really out-there ones. I have fans who have been with me since I started and those DMs I wouldn't call it crazy, but I definitely get sent pictures from 20-plus years ago and that's super cool for the most part. I did one time have someone send me an old yearbook photo from junior high and I'm still trying to figure out how they even found that. Trying to catch my eye the right way- I like a confident, respectful man who treats me like a lady. Open that door for me, hold my hand, and make sure I get to my destination safely. Be a gentleman and yourself. Manners matter! Expensive gifts and things like that don't matter to me as much as thoughtfulness. I'd much rather a man listen and give me their time and attention over just throwing money at me. And lastly, be an emotionally intelligent man of substance. Intelligence and kindness are unbelievably sexy. Worst thing a man can do- I have zero patience for guys who think that all they need is money. Money comes and goes, an entitled, arrogant attitude doesn't.

Advice to women love and relationships Don't let all the wrong guys discourage you. Invest in yourself and your own self-worth while you are single. Figure out who you are and what you want. Take chances and never be afraid to change directions. When you do find someone special, nurture it and love them for who they are. Tell them how much you appreciate them as well as show them, check in with them, and communicate to the point that you almost feel like you are overdoing it. You aren't. Communication really is key.

Any last words It's an honor to be in this month's magazine! Thank you so much for giving me the chance to share my answers with you.

Artist in Residence: Chloé Kovska

Familiar characters are reimagined as libidinous cartoons in the cheeky world of Chloé Kovska

WRITTEN BY **JEAN ANDRÉ**

I've had a crush on Chloé Kovska's work since I first spotted it on Instagram a few years ago. That delightful riot of bubble butts, red devils and Playboy Rabbit Heads nestled deep into my brain, where my inner child waits impatiently for me to go senile. Kovska has the ability to reduce forms to the essential, paying tribute to the American tattoo tradition and Golden Age comics and cartoons while adding her own primal twist. It's as though Tex Avery, Sailor Jerry and Robert Crumb got together and hosted an orgy at the Playboy Mansion. In her words, "I paint desires, urges, dreams, inspirations and memories with lovers, dressed up in cartoons."

I learned that Kovska grew up in Melbourne, Australia, where her father taught her to paint. She has shown her artwork in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Miami, but she mostly keeps to herself, preferring that the details of her life remain obscure. She likes to use canvas or cardboard and acrylic paint, which dries more quickly than oil and keeps colors bright—all the better to bring her kinky, trippy pop-cartoon visions to life.

I contacted her to get a piece to hang above my desk and another to be tattooed on my arm. I have tried not to fall in love with her, but it's hard: Aside from her gifts as an artist, Kovska is as sweet and beautiful as you would imagine. Ultimately, I prefer to sit in the audience, like Avery's Big Bad Wolf, my eyes bursting out of my head at Chloé Kovska's pink panthers, gorgeous goddesses and red-hot riding hoods.

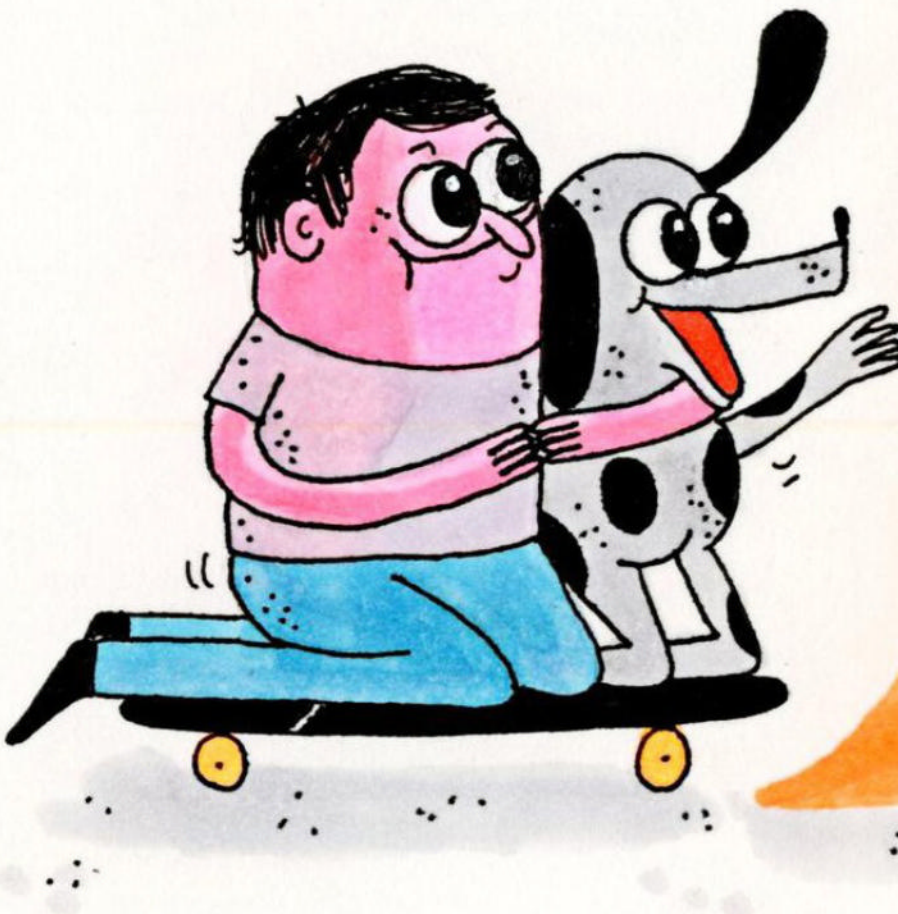
Playtime. Acrylic and gesso on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2016.

Sex Wolf. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2014.

As Quiet as a Mouse.... Acrylic on canvas,
18 x 14 inches, 2014.

Pink Panther and Little Dot, Acrylic on canvas,
24 x 20 inches, 2014.

Inspired by '76. Acrylic and gesso on
canvas, 18 x 14 inches, 2016.

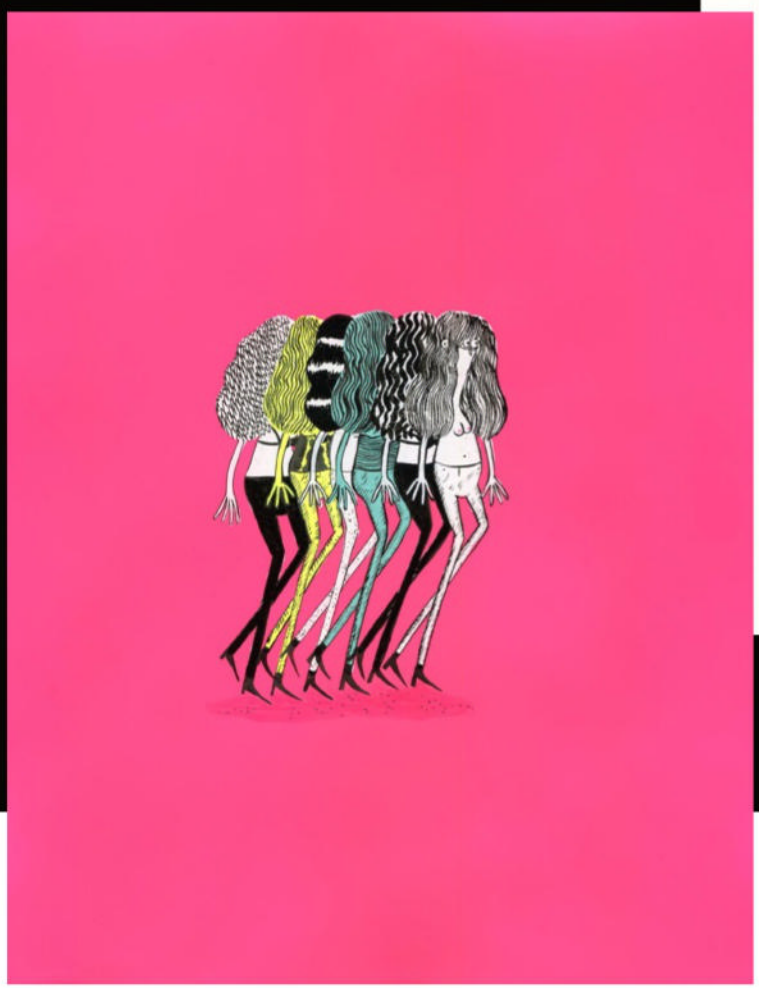


Artist in Residence: Jay Howell

Familiar characters are reimagined as libidinous cartoons in the cheeky world of Chloé Kovska

WRITTEN BY **SHEA ADAMS**

Long before he designed the main characters on the Fox cartoon series Bob's Burgers or co- created Nickelodeon's Sanjay and Craig, Jay Howell liked to draw his lanky bug-eyed figures onto the pages of found magazines (like PLAYBOY) and free-bin erotic novels. "It kind of satisfied my sick desire to feel like I'd accomplished something bigger," he says. "It's like, Hey, I'm part of the magazine now!" In addition to showing his work up and down the coast and illustrating skateboard decks for Consolidated and for Creature, the Bay Area native is probably the only artist with both Vans and Gucci collaborations under his belt. And now that the self-described "posh spaz" is our inaugural Artist in Residence, Howell's dream of appearing in the magazine has actually come true. He tells us he loves to "get high and fly first class" with a playboy in hand, and he excitedly describes how the great Shel Silverstein, having served as head cartoonist here in the 1950s and 1960s, traveled the globe as a sort of illustrator-journalist for the magazine. "I mean, imagine that. That's so fun!" Clearly the two artists have a connection beyond the Rabbit banner: Their work just feels good. "I try to be in a good mood constantly, so yeah, I'm a hippie, "Howell says, adding, "but I also own guns and love to drive fast cars.



20
Kehlani

In the lead-up to her new release, the soul-baring singer opens up to Playboy about playing with gender, finding new joy in song-writing, and how "being a mom is the sexiest thing ever."

BY **GERRICK D. KENNEDY** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BRIANNA ALYSSE**

Kehlani has never been afraid to reveal herself. Her joys, fears, triumphs and mistakes have stood front and center in her music since the beginning of her ascent to stardom. And that emotional intimacy, in all its heart-on-the-sleeve glory, stretches into her personality. Anyone who follows the 25-year-old singer-songwriter online (14 million people between her Twitter and Instagram, to be exact) knows Kehlani gives it to you straight, no chaser—whether it's riffing on her day or responding to a bully or a rumor about her life. If modern celebrity is a balancing act between being accessible and remaining enigmatic, Kehlani has succeeded by opting for warts-and-all transparency instead of carefully curated moods.

In just a few short years, the Oakland native has become one of pop's most vital voices, winning fans with optimistic meditations on romantic desire, anguish, self-love, sexual fluidity, spirituality and mental wellness. But it was a bumpy journey. Kehlani's father died when she was an infant, her mom was in and out of jail while struggling with addiction and she was placed in foster care before her aunt adopted her. The nation first met Kehlani as a wide-eyed teenager on America's Got Talent in 2011, when she was in an eclectic cover band hoping to catch a break. The group placed fourth in the competition, and judge Piers Morgan rightly noted that she'd be better off solo. But reality show platitudes don't mean much to a hungry teen with a dream, and Kehlani shouldered through shady industry deals and homelessness before AGT host Nick Cannon became a mentor, helping put a roof over her head and funding the studio time that allowed Kehlani to record her first mixtape, 2014's Cloud 19.

With her sweet, bubbly tunes that toed the line between frothy pop and buttery R&B, Kehlani made the kind of music that reminded us why we first fell in love with Whitney, Mariah and Brandy back in the day. Her 2015 mixtape, You Should Be Here, broke her to mainstream audiences, and a record deal with Atlantic and a Grammy nomination added to her rising stock in the industry. But as Kehlani's star ascended, the spotlight on her personal life intensified. She was one of a few queer women in pop music, and her romantic relationships and preference for unrestrained vulnerability became fodder for online bullies. All the hate and negativity Kehlani encountered online added to the pressures she felt ahead of her major-label debut, 2017's SweetSexySavage, a collection of vibrant pop and R&B she made while trying to get her head on straight.

And then came last year's It Was Good Until It Wasn't, a deeply personal album that showed her examining relationships and processing her feelings without the positivity afforded by youthful insouciance. She was a mother now—her daughter Adeya Nomi was born in 2019—and she was ready to do some alchemy on herself. It Was Good Until It Wasn't perfectly summed up where she was at the time: Her heart was filled with grief. The messy unraveling of her relationship with rapper YG was playing out on the blogs, and she was reeling from the tragic loss of close friends Chynna Rogers and Lexii Alijai, rising rappers who passed away three months apart (the album ends with a verse from Alijai).

It's the kind of heaviness that usually pushes an artist to make their most poignant work, and Kehlani was no exception. It Was Good Until It Wasn't was her most personal and successful project to date, speaking not only to how damn good the record is (many critics put it on their year-end lists, and it hit number one on the Billboard R&B charts), but also to Kehlani's bold decision to release it by tackling the creative promotion from her garage (with the blessing of her label) just as Covid-19 was upending the world. Maybe you, too, were stuck inside, sitting in your feels as a pandemic left folks lonely, afraid and detached from all we knew—and here came an album that made space for all of the languishing and horniness and misery and, ultimately, the healing that comes after loss.

Nearly a year after the album's release, Kehlani has found a peace that once seemed impossible. The world is still fucked up, but she's at joy in a way that is immediately apparent when her warm giggle echoes through my phone. She's calling from her home in Simi Valley, which she bought during the pandemic out of a desire to escape the noise of Los Angeles and build a commune for her tribe. Hearing the gleeful energy coming out of her nearly two-year-old daughter in the background, I can't help but feel a sense of pride thinking about how far she has come from when I first met her in 2017. She's gotten out of the darkness

that has clouded her for so long and is recording new music from a place of newfound happiness. Though she's tight-lipped about what shape the new music she's working on will take (A mixtape? An EP? An album?), Kehlani is certain it's the best music she's made yet. And as usual, she's ready to reveal all.

Q1: *It Was Good Until It Wasn't was one of 2020's most critically acclaimed*

albums. What sort of impact has that had on you? It really showed me a lot about my ability to create in times when we were told we wouldn't know what was going on: We don't know when the album can come out, and we don't know about videos. It showed me that I can create in my backyard. I can create in my garage. My music can reach these levels that are critically acclaimed, with people being really shocked—like, "Whoa, she really did create value." [It Was Good] pushed me to a huge limit, and that showed me more about myself, and more about my art. More than even the critical acclaimed-ness.

Q2: *Do you feel pressure to constantly create and release music?* People always want more. They consume at such a high rate. I fully understand that, so the only pressure I can apply is self-imposed. I'm blessed to be able to make so much music. Anybody who knows me knows that work is what I love to do. If I'm not at the studio, I'm home, completely focused on my baby. Then she comes with me to the studio. I don't feel outside pressure to create and release; I just love creating and releasing.

Q3: *Much of your work has been created as you went through personal heaviness. What is inspiring the next Kehlani project?* I've always got something up my sleeve. I have taken this opportunity during quarantine to go extremely inward, cracking down on my spiritual journey and spiritual self and enforcing boundaries I never had. I have a therapist, finally, who I absolutely love, and I have a routine of getting up and praying. I'm in this consistent, deep connection inwardly that I don't feel like I've ever had. I thought I had it. When you're a spiritual person and you finally find the real deep route to commit to, you always end up being like, "Oh, I really thought I was doing the work before." Now that I'm really doing the work, I'm like, "Oh, man, I was just carrying a bunch of crystals in my pockets." The new music I've been making is just a reflection of a healthy self, healthy love for the self, healthy love with spirit, healthy love—healthy everything around me. [*The music*] sounds really refreshing. It feels really refreshing. It feels grown.

"All of a sudden, I got these mom hips. I got this mom sensuality and grown-woman attitude and this in-touch-ness with my body that I nev-er had before."

Q4: *How has your approach to songwriting shifted?* In the beginning of my career it was very, "I have to keep the lessons. I have to push the self-love, push the young kid coming up and they can't tell me shit." I went through all the phases. It was like, coming-of-age love songs. And then it was young girl empowerment. And then It Was Good Until It Wasn't came, and I finally learned how to write with some depth about sadder things. I always wrote my way out of sadness with uplifting angles, but It Was Good Until It Wasn't taught me to alchemize my sorrow. The new music is not sad. I'm just not sad. I don't feel sorrow. I've been very blessed for this period of time—which could've gone a whole different way for me—to actually have taken me in a very positive direction. I don't take that lightly for one moment, because it's a really crazy time. It's honestly a very privileged thing to even be able to speak about the pandemic in this light.

Q5: *Your fans have such an intense connection with your music. How do you balance their expectations with your creative desires?* I just try to remember that, at the end of the day, I'm the only one left to face my own decisions, and self-betrayal feels way worse than disapproval from strangers. I could completely betray myself and make things my fans are obsessed with. Meanwhile, I'm over here itching to try new styles, itching to try new things. If I just put out what they want me to, then at the end of the day I'm going to feel worse because I'm going to be haunted by that. So I'd rather bite the bullet and put something out there I was really excited to make. Those who are meant to love it will find it. Some of my favorite songs I've ever written—a lot of my core younger fans who might have come to me for the mainstream R&B songs didn't understand them. Fast-forward a couple years and they're like, "Okay, I get 'Butterfly' now. I love 'Butterfly.'" People who get it will get it. People who don't, don't.

Q6: *What do you do when you feel stuck creatively?* You can't force it. Art is an alchemy and a medium shift, and you don't force a medium shift. If you're sitting at your altar and nothing's coming up for you, you don't force the spirits to talk. You might leave an offering. You might say a prayer. You might light a candle. You might light some herbs. You don't force the message to come to you; that's just not how it works. So in those times when I feel stuck, I might leave an offering for my art. That means I might go watch a classic film. I might take a walk or take a break and not think about music at all. I might go listen to a style of music I don't normally listen to—something that will feed me rather than force it out of me. I think about it the same way I think about spirits.

Q7: *You've talked about leaving L.A. and starting a farm and learning to live off the land. What are some of your favorite foods to cook?* Right now, I've been on such a soup kick. I've been trying to be on this no-waste kick. I feel like as passionate as I am about the world and people, it's very hypocritical of me to be a wasteful person while caring this much. I live with a couple people, so we run through things pretty fast. But there always seems to be that time every two weeks when things are about to go bad and we have to cook them. My favorite thing to do is just throw everything—all the vegetables—in a pot with some fucking vegetable broth and whatever spices are calling out to me and make a yummy-ass vegetable soup. It's the best way to eliminate having a big-ass throw-away vegetable pile at the end of the week.

Q8: *How did your childhood impact your approach to motherhood?* Having my child surrounded by me and her dad, but also so much love from other people, is super important,

because I always had family around. My aunt raised me, but I also had my cousins and my other aunties and two dogs. They tried to make sure I got lots of social engagement from my family that made me feel full all the time. There was always music playing in the house. At night, when any of us couldn't sleep, we would go take a drive around the lake in Oakland and go see the lights. Or simple things like waking up on Sunday morning and having cartoons and art projects. My aunt was really awesome and super, super, super fun. I'm carrying that into parenthood, knowing that kids don't need perfect parents—they need happy parents. The things we carry with us as adults are memories of joy, so I consciously create joyful moments in the house for her to carry throughout her life.

Q9: *You have been in the spotlight for almost a third of your life. When have you felt the most trapped professionally?* I've always seen such freedom, because I center my freedom. Everybody kind of allows me to do what I do. But back when everything was going on in 2016, I was like, "What if I just want to quit and run away?" And everybody was like, "Nah, you made it this far. You got to keep going. And you can't let anybody think they got you down so bad that you quit." As trapped as I felt and as much as I was like, "Fuck this. I hate everyone," I am really grateful that everyone woke me up to those thoughts and not only pushed me, but also gave me this safety net to let me know I'm never going to fall that hard again. That was the most trapped. But pressure makes diamonds, and you can only have light—true light—after darkness goes.

Q10: *What about personally?* Personally, the most trapped I've ever felt was probably the cycle of abuse in [a past] relationship. Just feeling like, "I know better, so why can't I do better?" It's this weird, rabbit-hole cycle of, like, "Am I being stupid?" But also, "How do I change things? Can I even change it? Do I have the strength to change this? What do I do?" That's psychologically the cycle of abuse. Once you're out of it or when you're looking from the outside, it seems like it's so simple to get up and leave. But when you're in it, it's a whole other experience.

Q11: *How did getting out of those situations shift your outlook on*

your life and career? It told me I am capable of anything, and my heart is never going to steer me to the wrong place as long as I'm listening to the correct side of it. And things are better on the other side. There is grass waiting for you on the other side, but you have to jump off the porch to get to it. That was a fear that stopped me for a long time. It's like, "I've really got to kick myself off the porch." Now I can leap off the porch. Now I can fly off the porch.

Q12: *You've always been incredibly transparent, but what's something you've never revealed in an interview?* Something I've never revealed in an interview? Hmmm. I'm currently looking for a doula certification program. The one I'm waiting for is closed until the spring. I'm really anxious to take it, and I'm trying to figure out how to navigate wanting to become a full-spectrum doula while being an R&B singer—or a singer in general. I should stop limiting myself to the word "R&B." I guess I've also never revealed that I don't consider myself an R&B artist.

Q13: *Which of your records was the most effortless to record?* A moment for me that was so beautiful was "Open (Passionate)." I went into the booth and I just kept saying, "Do I got you way too open to be open?" People were like, "Whoa, are you talking about what I think you're talking about?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I'm really trying to make the most beautiful, polyamorous song there is." I'm trying to talk about the technicalities of an open relationship and just fucking be real about how I feel about it. And putting those harmonies together was just super fun.

Q14: *What's the hardest part of fame?* I've had a hard lens on me since I was, like, 13 years old. Everyone you meet has some opinion on you, whether it's, p"I don't care for her," "I really care for her," "I don't care to care for her," "I've heard of her," "I think she looks funny." I sometimes can't walk into a room with a fresh slate, and it gives me a little bit of anxiety because I want to be a part of these community-based things, and I want to be in these spaces, and I want to participate in things and experience things as a 25-year-old girl. I often feel like, "Damn, I'm going to walk in there and it's going to be a thousand different energies sent my way because of people already holding these little pockets of energy for me before they've even met me."

Q15: *What's the easiest?* The easiest part of fame is having the ability to do something important. I've had friends who needed to find [stem cell] donors. They led a campaign and got so many people signed on, but I have the ability to say, p"Look, we need a bunch of people to donate their samples and take a swab test

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and send it in to be the match," and [get more people to sign on] so a lot of other people can find matches and potential donors. At the press of a button, I can tell millions of people something very important, and they can take part in it if they want to. You can make beautiful things happen really, really quickly.

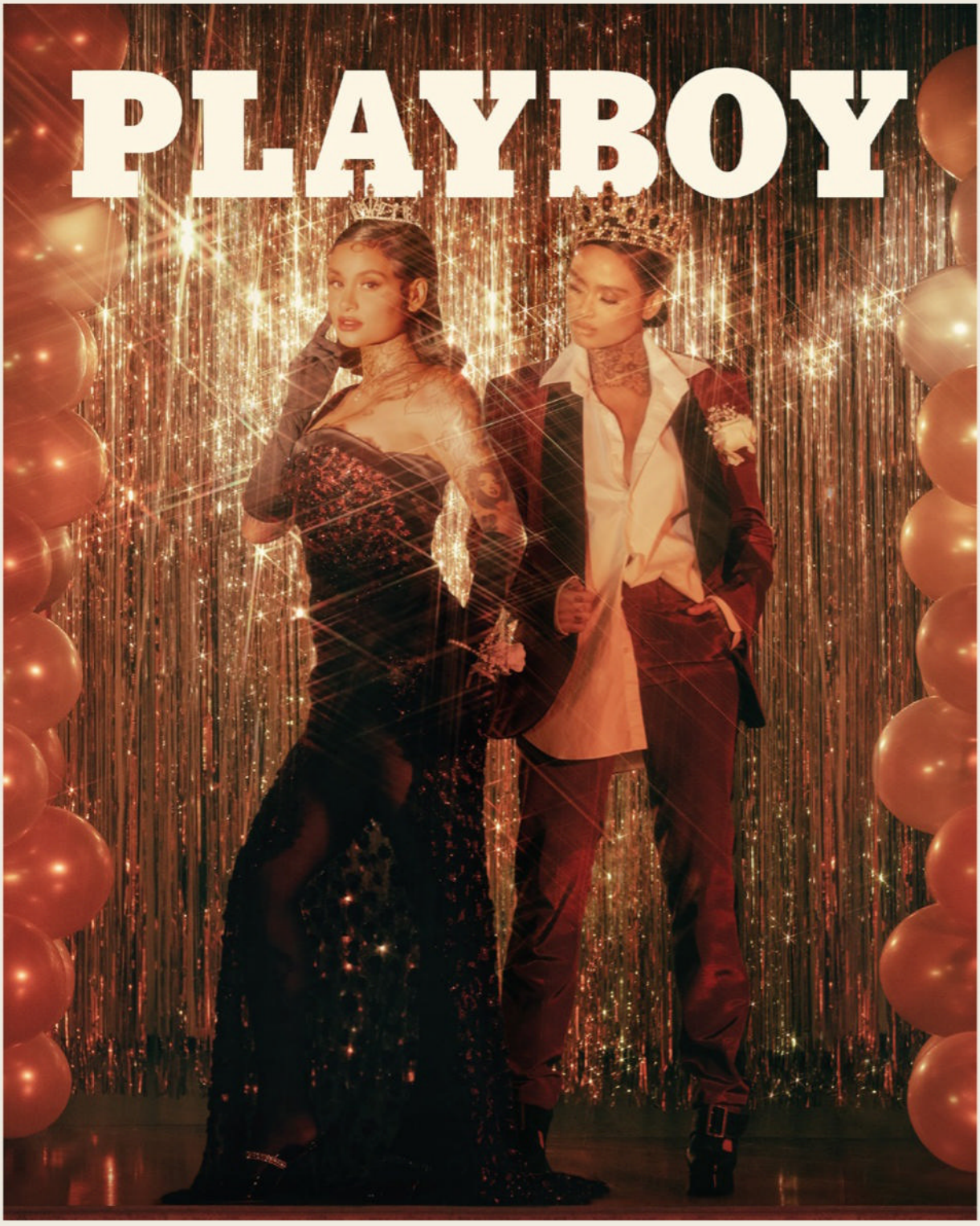
Q16: *Define masculinity and femininity for you, and what did it take for you to arrive at those definitions?* I've discovered that I've run from a lot of femininity. I was way more comfortable in a more masculine space. I feel more masculine when I am in my stillness and I'm grounded in a quiet, contemplative mode. I feel most feminine when I'm being the mother of my house. I also feel my femininity when I take time for self-care—when I take really beautiful baths where I throw some flowers in and I do a hair mask and take time oiling my body in the mirror and saying how beautiful I feel. My femininity makes me feel soft and gentle and tender and careful in a different way than my masculinity makes me feel. I'm trying not to let it fall into the gender norms of feminine and masculine, but for me it does a tiny bit. But I also am very fluid in both of those settings.

Q17: *When do you feel the sexiest?* I feel the sexiest when I'm really bare—when I'm taking extra time to oil up after my bath and put essential oils into my shea butter. For me, sexy is very internal. It's in the comfort and the feeling—not when do I look most sexy, but when do I feel scrumptious? When do I feel like, m"Oh, somebody could just come lick me from my head to my toe right now. That's how fucking good I smell, and that's how moisturized I am." That's when I feel sexy.

Q18: *How does it feel to be a sex symbol?* I hope people know being a mom doesn't make you less sexy. Being a mom is the sexiest thing ever. I think something happened to me when I became a mom; I just became sexier. I was this quirky little person before—not super in touch with myself, a super tomboy. Then I became a mom, and all of a sudden I got these mom hips. I got this mom sensuality and grown-woman attitude and in-touch-ness with my body that I never had before. You really fucking get to know your body when you birth. When you get pregnant, you become a fucking universe and a portal. So I think motherhood has made me this insane sex symbol even to myself.

Q19: *So many people were telling you about the quarantine sex they were having to songs from It Was Good Until It Wasn't. I have to ask, what are some of your go-to sex jams?* Oh, this is so funny. I don't like songs with words when I have sex, because I feel it's just the wrong— I don't like people to talk to me too much unless it's really natural. If I hear, p"Whose is it? What's my name? Blah, blah, blah," I'll be like, "Shut up! I don't know why you're doing this. It's uncomfortable." Like, I'm about to fall out of whatever mood I was in. So I like to listen to these lo-fi, beat playlists. They're so nice and it transforms it to a whole other world.

Q20: *What does joy look or feel like for you?* Joy feels like when you know there's absolutely nothing you would change about a moment and there's nothing you could change to make you any more joyous. Like, m"Even the way the sun is coming through the window while I'm making breakfast, and the way my daughter is stomping around the kitchen cracking up, and this song that's playing is perfect and she's singing along, and my puppy is sunbathing and the plants in the kitchen just got watered so they're flourishing." Every single moment of the day is just perfect.


PLAYBOY

Novelist Paul Beatty Is Making Room for Writers of Color

The Man Booker Prize winner discusses his latest risk-taking work, the challenges of writing and the power of language and literature.

BY **JAMES YEH**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**

Paul Beatty may be America's most hilarious—and subversive—writer. In September, the Los Angeles native's daring fourth novel, The Sellout, was short-listed for the prestigious 2016 Man Booker Prize. The gleefully unhinged satire follows the misadventures of one Bonbon Me, an urban weed and watermelon farmer whose father, a prominent psychologist and "Nigger Whisperer," is gunned down by the LAPD. With the settlement money, Bonbon reinstitutes segregation, acquires an elderly slave and lands himself, stoned, before a baffled Supreme Court.

"It all starts with the language," says the 54-year-old author (who was also the first-ever Grand Poetry Slam champion, in 1990). "That's where all the latticework is for me." Indeed, the thrill of The Sellout lies not only in Beatty's delirious conceit but also in his virtuoso riffs that take bull's-eye aim at race, class, pop culture and propriety in our supposedly postracial America.

"I get nervous when things don't make people nervous," Beatty says. "A lot of writers of color feel there are certain directions they have to take: what your point of view should be, who can do what, how positive it has to be. Somebody's always going to tell you what it means to be a black writer, what responsibilities you have. Just trying to create some space is important to me."

And that's exactly what Beatty does, obliterating the boundaries of what is funny, what is profane and what is just so sad and unfixable that we can only laugh to keep from crying. There's a bit of truth in every good joke, and perhaps in that truth we are able, after the laughs subside, to better see the world and ourselves in it.

PLAYBOY: How do you deal with the challenges of being a writer?

BEATTY: I don't really believe there's a point to anything, a purpose—not to the point that things don't make a difference or don't have meaning, but I just don't care whether it does. So I think that makes it a little easier, takes a bit of the pressure off. Writing's hard; it's not very fun. Other writers will say the fun is in having done it, but even then there's how do you deal with the recognition, whether it's there or not, and how do you deal with failure. It's all a fucking challenge.

"There's still this notion that there's only room for one fucker. It's just, can we have a range? That's all we're asking for."

PLAYBOY: One of the great pleasures of reading The Sellout is its language. It actually seems like you're having a lot of fun, more fun that the average writer.

BEATTY: You can just do everything with language, you know what I mean? That's what keeps me charged. How does this read; really just trying to capture the sentiment that I had in my head. I almost don't want to talk about it. That's the fun part, that's the challenging part. It all goes together.

PLAYBOY: You use so many incredible, gleefully twisted phrases and neologisms—"Afro-agrarian," "Allah ak-open bar," "languid bojangle," to name just a few—that are as thrilling as they are unsettling, and that often make you laugh and flinch at the same time. What audience did you have in mind when you were writing?

BEATTY: It's about the dissonance. The word nigger is in this. The book is about what you can do and what you can say. [*When I write*] I'm doing some calculus, but I do it with every word. It's not about what's on the page, it's about me and you having the conversation. The exegesis of the whole thing. I think there's so much fun in not understanding. I heard Marlon James say it's not his job to solve the mystery, it's his job to render the mystery. And I love that.

I think about writing to this best friend who doesn't really exist, or to this group of best friends. I just have to trust that somebody will get it. I don't want to make it easy. It's not like I'm trying to make it hard, but for me it's not easy. For me it's an age-old issue, between commercial and acceptability. I'm just trying to do what I want to do and get what I want to say out there.

PLAYBOY: What is it about the black-owned Chinese restaurant that makes it the "holy grail of racial equality"?

BEATTY: How come you can't have LeRoy's Twin Dragon? It speaks to possibilities.

PLAYBOY: At what point will you feel like you've succeeded in effecting change?

BEATTY: It's something that I write about a little bit. When I think about change, I'm one of those people who are like, "Oh, nothing ever changes." How people talk about change and progress I find really disturbing. It's like, "Obama's president and therefore the world is better." Yeah, I can't really answer that question. You get little things, like I got a letter from a kid—I'm not saying I changed him, but he was appreciative. I often think—I don't know if it's true—my books are hard to read on a couple of levels. I'm appreciative. I try to be unique and new. That's really important to me.

I was at this book event. A guy came up to me—a pretty successful writer—and he was like, "Yeah, reading you when I was younger was so helpful to me because I realized I could just be myself."

When he said that to me, that's nice. It's just that notion of, "How do I break out of this box?" There's still this notion that there's only room for one fucker. I think people really feel that, whether it's true or not. It's just, can we have a range? That's all we're asking for. The change is, the more people who are doing shit, even if I think 90 percent of it is bad, that's still good. Even in that simple way, if there's an alternative voice, or an alternative tone, I think that's good. We need these things.

Media Wunderkind Noor Tagouri Makes a Forceful Case for Modesty

BY **ANNA DEL GAIZO**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KATE WARREN**

For anyone with preconceived ideas about women who choose to wear a headscarf every day, Noor Tagouri is disorienting. She's simply not what you expect: a 22-year-old journalist (she likes to call herself a storyteller) on the verge of becoming this country's first hijab-wearing news anchor.

As of June, she's an on-air reporter for Newsy, where she provokes the sort of confusion we could use right now, in part by making a surprisingly bold case for modesty. As a badass activist with a passion for demanding change and asking the right questions, accompanied by beauty-ad-campaign looks, Tagouri forces us to ask ourselves why we have such a hard time wrapping our minds around a young woman who consciously covers her head and won't take no for an answer.

The reporter chats about the state of journalism today and her effort to break through as the first 'hijabi' news anchor in American TV history

A West Virginia native and first-generation Libyan American, Tagouri graduated from college at the age of 20. In 2012, her #LetNoorShine campaign went viral. Her 2015 TEDx talk advocated unapologetic individuality, and her YouTube channel draws tens of thousands of viewers. More recently, she collaborated with streetwear brand Lis'n Up Clothing on a fashion line that includes a Jean-Michel Basquiat–inspired sweatshirt. Half the purchase proceeds go to Project Futures, an anti-human-trafficking organization. Americans have a long way to go when it comes to how we regard Muslims, but with Tagouri burning down stereotypes and blazing new paths, we're a healthy stride closer.

PLAYBOY: Your goal is to become the first hijabi anchor on commercial U.S. television. What's the biggest challenge you face in your work?

TAGOURI: The biggest challenge I face as a storyteller is the process of getting people to trust you enough to tell their stories. Our society has seemingly become so desensitized to violence, abuse, death, rape and trauma. I find that people who go through these traumatic experiences have a hard time trusting reporters. Just a few days ago, I had an anonymous artist tell me he doesn't do interviews because he doesn't want reporters to "take [*his*] words and run with it".

People want to be valued and heard. Their experiences are so personal and they want their voices to come through in a story. It's a process, but building that level of trust takes time, effort and patience. I'm actually struggling with a few powerful stories right now because he people involved are still suffering. Unfortunately they're having a hard time being okay with someone sharing their story. Which is totally understandable, but it's a process.

PLAYBOY: How have you confronted that?

TAGOURI: Being able to share in the vulnerability of the people I talk to helps me gain their trust. I recently did a documentary titled The Trouble They've Seen: The Forest Haven Story, about one of the worst cases of institutional and medical abuse in the history of the U.S. When I decided to do the piece, I knew I needed to talk to people close to the case—someone who lived in the institution, a parent, their family members, an employee and the lawyers involved. It took a few visits with each person to get them to agree to do an interview.

To be honest, I think being a hijabi Muslim woman, helped me gain that trust. I know what it's like to have the narrative of our community be skewed and exploited in the media. I was like, "Hey, I know what it's like to be misrepresented in the media. I won't do that to you. I want to tell your story because it's important and deserves justice." I know first-hand that once people are re-empowered, they realize their own story is powerful and they begin to share. It's incredibly rewarding and can even help enlighten or save others.

PLAYBOY: How have you dealt with backlash, especially in our current political climate?

TAGOURI: If by backlash you mean hate and criticism, I don't read or pay attention to any of it. It's just negative energy and unhealthy. I make sure to keep a great circle of people around me who keep me grounded. Whether it's at work or at home, the people who have my best interest at heart voice their concerns and their critiques, and I work on them. Besides that, I just do the best I can to not worry about people who get upset because they don't like something that I wear or say.

The first story I did with Newsy was on Middle Eastern and North African Americans being considered "white" on the U.S. census and how that might change on the 2020 census. I referred to it as "White Without the Privilege." There was a ton of backlash on Facebook from people who didn't like the story. It was comical seeing people telling me to "go back home" when in fact, I was born in West Virginia. My team insisted that I never read the comments, so I stopped. The thing is, that story was based on facts. I constantly remind myself to just do the work I believe in and ignore the angry people behind computer screens.

PLAYBOY: At what point will you feel like you've succeeded in effecting change?

TAGOURI: I will have succeeded in effecting change when all girls realize they can do anything they want without having to sacrifice who they are as a person. I may dress a little different—I'm a reporter who happens to wear a head scarf and I live in my hoodie—but being a story teller, motivational speaker, entrepreneur and unapologetically myself has opened so many doors for thousands of people. I recently had a mom come up to me and tell me that her daughter is in the 6th grade and had just started wearing the hijab. She shared how a lot of the other girls tease her and put her down because of the hijab. She went on to tell me that her daughter watches all of my videos and every time she gets picked on, she pulls up my Instagram or tells them to "google Noor Tagouri and then talk to me." Those are the moments that hit me. And I always remember Maya Angelou's quote, "I come as one, but I stand as 10,000."

PLAYBOY: What is your call to action to readers?

TAGOURI: Live your life as your truest self and encourage others to do the same! Support each other. We have to live for the 10,000 who have come before us, who have made it easier for us to get to where we are today, but also for the 10,000 coming after us, so we can continue to break barriers and glass ceilings and reclaim our power. Do good, stay fearless and remember that everything you want is just outside your comfort zone.

"Being a hijabi Muslim woman helps me gain trust. I say, 'I know what it's like to be misrepresented in the media. I won't do that to you.' "

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We're happy to have you featured on Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? It's been a long journey, I never saw myself getting into modeling. Not even as a child. When people ask what you want to be when you're older, I always say doctor because I was obsessed with the medical shows on television. It all started in the back of a classroom when I was 18 with only fans. That was the first 'form' of modeling I started with, then it progressed further and further booked my first modeling shoot for free with a photographer, and was addicted. Best addiction to have in my mind! Now it has a snowball effect, more opportunities opening up being featured in Forbes magazine for entrepreneurship and modeling etc, TV appearances, and a lot of radio coverage.

Having a full schedule must make it difficult for you to get much alone time, talk to us about the top 3 must-dos to ensure you fit in some well-deserved downtime. You are correct, it doesn't come easy. Balancing a work and personal life is tough. Sometimes I still feel like I need to work on it. The biggest must-do for me is at least once a day whether it's before bed or when I wake up. Reflect on what I've achieved, where I started, and now where I am. Sometimes I feel like I haven't done enough when there are so many people who could only dream of the position and opportunities I have been blessed with. Secondly, I'd have to say a must is nutrition and sleep. This is something that is something major that sometimes I believe, gets overlooked. Not looking after your physical self impacts you so much mentally. It's crazy how much it does impact when you aren't looking after yourself. Even something as simple as 20 minutes of cardio changes everything! Lastly for me a strong support network goes a long way. They can always hear it in my voice or even in something as minuscule as how I word something on a social media post, my friends pick up on it and tell me to sit down and chill the f*ck out. They know how hard I work, that I don't like to stop and I'm so driven to do as much as I can day in and day out.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? It truly means a lot to me. I never cease to amaze myself with what I can achieve. I wouldn't want myself to be seen in another other light. Physical looks are fantastic but I think that as a society we are starting to realize how attractive it is to have those characteristics. I surround myself with people of the same caliber so it helps me to reach my fullest potential.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about what you do? As time goes on I believe the misconceptions are changing about modelling and the adult industry as a whole. Definitely the main misconception and I'd even say stereotype would be that we are all 'dumb' and 'haven't worked a day in our lives'. I definitely wouldn't say we are the hardest working people out there because that's immeasurable. Working 80-90 hours a week, constantly putting strain on the body is something that a lot of different industries do and ours is no different. Now the 'dumb' part of the biggest misconception I can't speak for everyone but all of the beautiful women I have met so far in my career have been the most driven, business-minded people I've met. Seriously, I've met people from all walks of life and the fact of the matter is most of us strive to break that idea. It drives us harder the more people think about it.

What does freedom of self-expression mean to you? Well, it means exactly that. Freedom. Something that others still struggle to do every day. It's something I often take for granted living in a Westernized country. To be able to speak my mind/opinion and it is okay, whether others share the same or they don't. I am able to do so without fear of persecution or consequence.

We absolutely love your Instagram, your content is very dynamic, inspirational, and downright sexy, could you perhaps tell us what your personal experience as an influencer has been like? I have always had a passion for social media. I remember being 12 years old and secretly creating a Facebook account to post pictures on when I wasn't allowed to haha. Sorry dad! Ba-

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sically from that age onwards, I knew that social media was my thing. Creating things that grabbed people's attention and shoved me into the limelight. 'Influencing' just came with part of the ambition. I share things and people either love it or they hate it but I share my own journey and everything I love. Trying to use social media as a positive tool rather than a negative is an ongoing issue in our society today. In saying that, there is always going to be and has been negative connotations to what I do. As I stated not everyone agrees with what you do or how you say something and that's something I deal with constantly. When put into situations where people look up to you there is always constant 'constructive' feedback people are giving you on what you've done or said when it's never been asked for.

3 things that you can't go a day without. 3 things I can't go without. Mmmm. The gym is first on this list. Without it / without exercise it'd go crazy! I like to look after myself, as I mentioned earlier even if it's something as little as 20 minutes. I've gotten my blood pumping and it's a great way to start the day. Secondly would have to be as simple as a phone call to my grandma, honestly, she keeps me so grounded. Whenever life is crazy and things are flying left right and center she is always there to be the traffic controller and calm me down. Keeps me remembering where I came from and where I am headed. My favorite saying is "Rome wasn't built in a day!".

What about those crazy DMs you must receive? Care to share a few funny stories regarding those? Where do I start? The same line is normally repeated constantly in my dms "Can we film together?!", I've had loads of influential people say the same thing too with one request.. If their face can be hidden. I find it funny that I've actually got sexual content with athletes and even 1 rapper signed with a major record label.

Now we're sure you experience a lot of male attention on and offline, any advice you would like to give to men out there who are hoping to catch your eye the right way? Classy is in and sleazy is out! Let's take it back a decade or two when you had a real-life conversation with a woman and asked her out on a date and don't worry about paying for us both! I have my own money but for a man to take the initiative to ask is a huge green flag and gives a lot of brownie points in my opinion.

What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? The absolute worst thing a man can do that is going to change my whole outlook on him and put me off is lie. It sounds very cliche but if I can't trust you then what's the point? I think one thing that can be a struggle is honesty, be honest and don't lie to me about your intentions whether it has to do with something as big as your feelings for me within a relationship or even what you want for dinner. Just because I want steak for dinner doesn't necessarily mean you want it to and that's okay! I don't even believe in 'white lies'.

That said, what advice would you have to give to all women out there when it comes to love and relationships? I think so far within my experience and past relationships, I'm the last person to give any advice but what I've learned so far is that 'what will be will be' and the same 'everything happens for a reason'. You'll never stop the other person from cheating, If they want to do it then they will. Recently I have learned that trying to keep control of everything in your life just inside attainable, doesn't work. Trust me I've tried and failed...I'm probably going to look back at this article and say "damn I really need to start taking my own advice lol".

Thank you so much for sitting down with us and letting us get to know you! Any last words for our readers out there? I've had a lot of fun sharing my insight into these questions, I'd like to finish off with something that I have learned during my short time on this earth. Remember at the end of the day you are your own person, you're the only one that's going to be there for you. Your boyfriend now might not be there in a few year's time, maybe not even tomorrow. They say family is forever... not for some people. Make sure you always look after yourself and never depend on anyone else. Ever. Create the life you want to live and don't wait for anyone.

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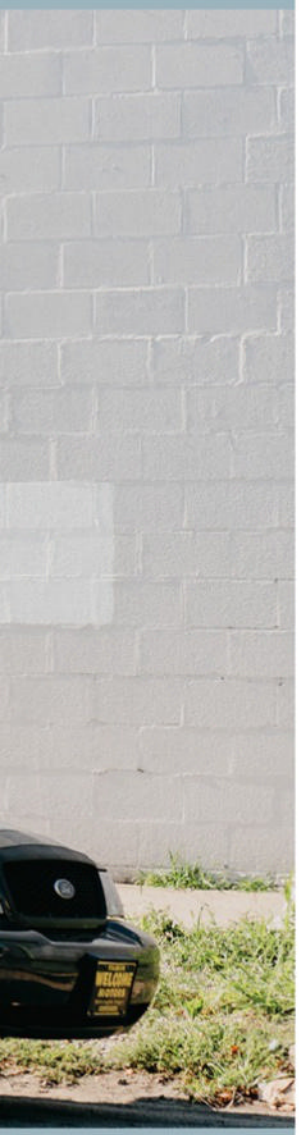
Frontwoman Laura Jane Grace Proves That the Personal Is Always Political

The punk rock trailblazer on fighting for what she believes in

BY **JONAH BAYER**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**



Laura Jane Grace has been minutely scrutinized since she started the band Against Me! as an anarchist-inspired solo project in 1997. Punk purists frothed as the Gainesville, Florida group's sound evolved from lo-fi folk to full-on anthemic pop punk, leading to a major-label record deal in 2007. (These days, the band releases music on its own Total Treble imprint.) Fans and critics stopped and stared when Grace came out as transgender in 2012—an event with few precedents in the testosterone-drenched world of punk rock. This November, two months after the release of the seventh Against Me! album, *Shape Shift With Me*, Grace will cap off her odyssey so far with a memoir titled *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout*.

Back in May, Grace made headlines for burning her birth certificate onstage in North Carolina to protest the state's anti-trans bathroom law. But her music and writing signal a more intimate strain of activism: Listening to Against Me! songs such as "I Was a Teenage Anarchist" and "True Trans Soul Rebel," it becomes clear that Grace has always lived where the personal and the political collide. Her painfully honest, deeply human way of articulating that friction is the definition of Grace. And she still believes in the scene that has sustained her, even as it has threatened to drown her in expectations. "The influence that punk rock has had on my life is astounding," she says. "I just think music is infinitely important."

PLAYBOY: What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career?

LJG: That's a good soft one to start out with. [Laughs] Well, I don't know if it's clichéd or whatever, but the challenge is longevity. It's your biggest hurdle to keep it all together, whether that's keeping a band together or even keeping your emotional state together, to continually remember that the reason you do what you do is because you love playing music and not become bitter or jaded. That's not an easy thing to do, you know? It's not an easy thing to be a band for 20 years by any means.

PLAYBOY: How do you think you've managed to keep it together for so long?

LJG: You just have to work for it; it has to be worth it for you fight for. I've spent a lot of time wondering, going through my second divorce, if I'm able to be in a committed relationship, and when I asked myself that question I'm always like, I've been committed to James [*Bowman, guitarist in Against Me!*] and committed to doing this band, so I know I have that ability. But just like a marriage, you have to really be willing to sacrifice.

PLAYBOY: How do you deal with backlash, which you've dealt with since day one with this band?

LJG: Right, and I think there's been times where I've dealt with it poorly and times where I've been able to manage it. I'm thankful for those experiences because I think it has given me good perspective—not just on backlash, but on praise, too. You just have to take it all with a grain of salt. It's nice when people say good things about you, but it means just as much as when people say bad things about you, and that shouldn't determine why you do something or what you get out of something or whether or not it's successful to you.

PLAYBOY: Especially in punk. People can get worked up about a band signing to a label or something like that and then you get a little older and wonder what you were so mad about.

LJG: [*Laughs*] But it all seemed so important at the time.

PLAYBOY: Exactly.

LJG: I've been that way with bands. I know that some of the time that's just being young, and some of the time that's something just meaning so much to you at a time in your life and fearing change. But change is inevitable.

PLAYBOY: For so long you were under the microscope as far as signing to a big indie and then a major, and it seems like once you came out, that other stuff became way less of a big deal.

LJG: I like to hope that when I came out it gave people some sense that the decisions I made were decisions I made because that's the way I thought and felt about what I had to do to survive. Those weren't always things that I felt like I could or even wanted to explain to other people, and that just comes back to being certain why you're doing something—thinking for yourself and making your own decisions, not being influenced by what others expect from you. And being prepared that sometimes you'll disappoint people or sometimes people are not going to get it, but in order to survive you have to be confident in yourself.

PLAYBOY: Burning your birth certificate onstage was a very tangible example of someone really standing behind her beliefs.

LJG: You have to walk the talk, you know? For me, I don't have a separation in my life in what I do with the band and a home life. I mean, it's not like I change into a different person or suddenly start thinking about things differently when I'm in show mode versus when I'm at home mode. It all has to be an extension of your life, and the way you approach making music should be the way you approach living your life, you know?

PLAYBOY: How would you say your new book figures into everything you've said here? Is it scary or exciting waiting for it to come out?

LJG: It's both a relief and totally fucking terrifying, you know? I try to be really polite when people come up to me and say they're excited to read my book. I'm like, "Thank you, thank you, awesome, yeah," but inside I'm thinking Oh god, I'm so scared of people reading my book.

PLAYBOY: I'm sure you've changed so many people's perspectives by putting this stuff out there, even if they don't tell you about it personally.

LJG: Sure. But the moments when people do personally tell you—that really does mean a lot.

Iconoclast Jason Dill Is Returning Skateboarding to Its Obscenely Awesome Roots

The famed skater chats about his near-death experience, redefining the skate shop business and his role on Netflix's Love

BY **ROBERT BRINK** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**

In 2009, pro skateboarder Jason Dill had to call 911 on himself. He was throwing up blood all over his New York City apartment and suffering from a gastric hemorrhage. The Jameson, Vicodin and Percocet cocktails had finally taken their toll.

"I didn't think I'd even survive," says Dill, who now stars on the Netflix series Love. "When I'm on the set, I'm quiet as a mouse. I'm just so blown away and thankful I'm there. And the last thing I ever wanted was the responsibility of owning a company that people expect more from—because owning a company is a pain in the ass."

In 2013, after kicking the pills and spending more time on his board, Dill ditched his longtime sponsor, Alien Workshop—one of the most popular skateboarding companies ever—and walked away from

a partial-ownership offer to co-found board brand Fucking Awesome, an extension of his self-funded apparel side project.

In doing so, Dill dumped a bucket of ice on the once-countercultural world of skateboarding, which in the previous 17 years had devolved into a G-rated parody of itself to appease moms and malls, and woke it the fuck up. The exodus of Alien's riders to Fucking Awesome was swift. It's now one of the top-selling and most knocked-off companies in boards and streetwear, despite its provocative graphics, null social media presence and label that prevents mass retail saturation.

PLAYBOY: When Fucking Awesome launched as a skateboard brand in 2013, it wasn't uncommon to hear industry folk say, "They're never going to make it. They'll never get into mall shops with that name."

DILL: You see where their brains went immediately? That's what's wrong with the industry—all this bullshit people talk. I'm sorry because some of them are my friends, but with their two-and-a-half car garage and two and a half kids in their suburb of Portland, of course they're not going to be like, "Let's go nuts!" They'd lose their fucking jobs. Luckily, I'm not fighting to keep my two and a half kids in the latest expensive daycare. I don't give a fuck. No family, no car and no mortgage payments means I just shoot this shit out of my fucking soul.

PLAYBOY: Die-hards have criticized the skateboarding industry for pandering to the mainstream so much and becoming so non-offensive that a word like "fucking" seems shocking. That's what's so scary. If it were 1993, no one would bat an eye. You disrupted the entire industry.

DILL: I'd be lying if I said I wasn't pleased that things were disrupted, because I am. I most certainly wasn't aiming for Alien Workshop to almost go out of business, because after being with them for 15 years, quitting was emotionally insane. But going into skate shops these days, looking at the wall and seeing other board brands trying really hard is great, because none of them were trying this hard before and I know that's a direct result of FA. Anyone who thinks that statement is over the top, go ahead and think that but you can also eat my butt, because it's the truth. I see people bite us over and over again and it's ridiculous because they don't even realize everything they bite. That forces me to go make something else that's out of their realm because I know they won't think of it. And then they bite that, too.

When I visit skate shops like Uprise in Chicago, Seasons in Albany, Orchard in Boston or Exit in Philadelphia, owners tell me that I helped bring skate shops back. They feel FA brought the kids and excitement back because new kids started coming in only asking for FA. Shit like that is such a big compliment that I feel funny saying it back to you.

PLAYBOY: After you were hospitalized in 2009, you kind of disappeared from skateboarding. In your own mind, did you ever imagine owning a respected company like FA?

DILL: No. It's totally fucking insane. That's why when I'm on the set of Love I take it all in. I'm just so fucking blown away. I didn't think I'd survive. I really didn't. I never wanted my own company. Wanna know why? Because it's a fucking pain in the ass! When people expect more, they expect it fucking tomorrow. If you came out with some shit yesterday, they wanna see the new shit next week. It's just ridiculous day in and day out, but I suppose it's like having a kid. I take care of it. I love it. I can't let it go to a community college, you know? I gotta raise it right. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: Skateboarding is a trend-oriented sport. Things are hot for a year or three and then they're not. We've all seen the shelf life some skate brands have.

DILL: I'm now past my third year of FA. I'm proud of what we've done. If you are a company making stuff, you need to have it in the back of your head that, hey, I might have to kill this thing one day for the greater good so it doesn't look like a bunch of bullshit. Imagine if Mark Gonzales got to end his skate company, Blind. How would we look at it today? Imagine if Mark had made some deal with Steve Rocco, the owner of his distributor early on, like, "I'll totally do this, but when I think it's time that this is done, I get to put out an ad that says, 'It's done. We killed it. It's over. Thank you.'" I feel a lot of people think when you start a company, you just ride it until someone comes along and buys you. That's not the fucking case here. I'd rather it die than look bad.

PLAYBOY: Killed at the peak.

Yeah, like Michael Jordan did, until he played baseball and came back and played for the fucking Wizards. It was like, c'mon, dude! I know I didn't invent this way of thinking, but I feel it serves me best.

PLAYBOY: You also star on Judd Apatow's hit Netflix series, Love. How did that come about?

About a year and a half ago I was in Los Angeles and saw my friend [TV writer] Lesley Arfin on the street. She was like, "Hey, I'm making this television show with my boyfriend and we think you'd be good in it." I was at point when I really needed everything to be completely spot-on with FA—production and all that bullshit—so I was like, "I'm not really into it. That sounds crazy. I don't think I have time." She told me, "I knew you'd say that, but it's Judd Apatow and it's guaranteed two seasons for Netflix. Will you audition?"

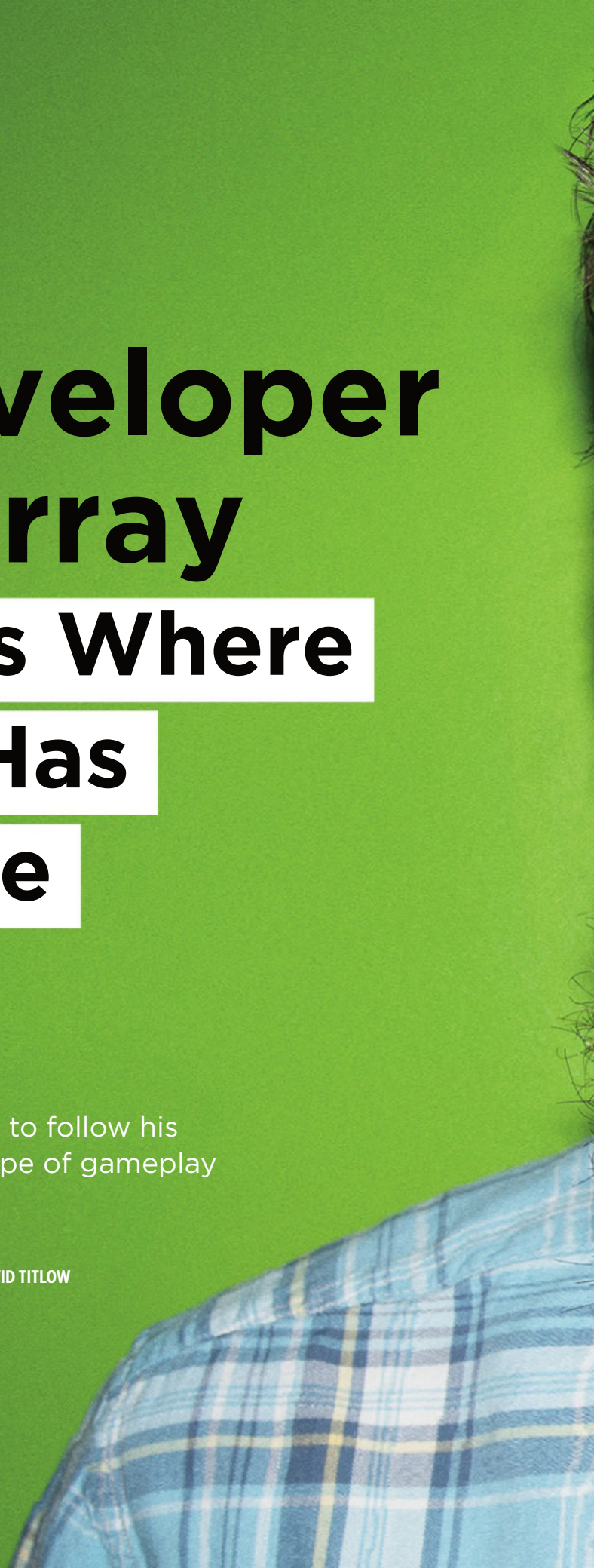
And I fucking did. Before I knew it they were asking me to come to Sony Pictures and do a reading in front of Judd. I was so fucking nervous. It was wild because I'm not an actor.

The second season's done now and I'm happy to be on it. Everyone was really nice. All of them knowing I wasn't an actor coming into it was just super cool because I'd do a scene with a stand-up comedian and they'd be like, "Dude you're doing good." I'm like, "Really? All right. Good."

Indie Developer Sean Murray Boldly Goes Where No Gamer Has Gone Before

Will leaving a big-studio gig to follow his passion and create a new type of gameplay pay off?

BY **MIKE ROUGEAU** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAVID TITLOW**



Everyone dreams of being an astronaut; Sean Murray made a game that lets you play one. This summer, the 36-year-old's company, Hello Games, released one of the most ambitious video games in recent history: No Man's Sky. The gorgeous sci-fi adventure allows players to explore more than 18 quintillion planets—yes, quintillion—thanks to clever environment-generation technology. Travel to massive worlds suffused with rich colors and teeming with alien creatures—then dodge galactic cops in your spacecraft.

The Ireland-born, Australian outback–raised Murray created his first game when he was just five. "My parents always joke that this is all I ever wanted to do," he says.

Murray founded Hello Games in 2008 with three friends after quitting his job at Criterion, a big studio that got bought by EA, an even bigger studio. Sick of slaving away on blockbusters such as the Burnout series, he wanted to flex his creative muscles. Today that's not a unique origin story for an independent game developer, but back then, in the days before the Apple App Store, it was.

"We were some of the first people to do that," he says. "In our minds, it wasn't some path to success. It was more like, I can't work here anymore, and I need to go do something different."

No Man's Sky, the third release from Hello Games, launched in August after three years of feverish buildup among gamers obsessed with the promise of endless exploration. It's a high-water mark for video games—and like a true artist, that's all Murray really cares about.

PLAYBOY spoke with Murray just before the U.S. launch of No Man's Sky; here's what he had to say about setting out to make an impact, dealing with fan backlash and exactly what makes Hello Games successful.

PLAYBOY: You set out to make something that you felt would have a greater impact than your earlier games.

MURRAY: Yes. This is hard to describe: You're having this kind of midlife crisis, and you're not actually thinking, "Oh my God, this is going to blow people away." What you're thinking is like, "I don't know whether I'm a good programmer. I don't know whether I would actually be capable of doing something like really different." You know, it's like challenging yourself. I wasn't thinking, "This will be some crazy like commercial success" or "This will be some big hit with people." I was thinking, "I want to do something really cool that I'm excited about," you know? And that was what drove it.

We actually, when three of us, the three others joined me and we like sat in that room, the pitch to everyone was like: We have just spent a few years making Joe Danger and we made some money from that, and we have to take that money and get it out of us—like do something crazy and burn through this and not worry about ever having commercial success or whatever. Let's just do something that we really enjoy for the next year and see what we get to.

PLAYBOY: I don't know how often you go on the subreddit—hopefully not that often because those people are crazy. I think anything that builds to this level, it's inevitable that there is going to be some backlash, and No Man's Sky is no exception. How do you guys deal with that aspect of it?

MURRAY: [*Laughs*] Yeah, it's a tough one. There's a thing in video games, I think more than any medium, where this is excitement, and excitement's really good, but for some reason, for some people, that turns into hype, which is a kind of an unrealistic, intangible level of excitement kind of thing where it's unattainable. I am always nervous and terrified about people getting hyped about our game. I definitely have always tried to just show great gameplay, stand on stage at E3 and just play the game and be reasonably open and honest about what the game is or what we're doing, you know, and be open as a studio. And when the game comes out, yeah, there will inevitably be a backlash of some sort, because some people have been waiting for like three years! And it's actually really hard to wait for anything for three years and feel like justified. You want it to be perfect, you know?

> "I am always nervous and terrified about people getting hyped about our game."

And you'll have seen that around lots of good games. Destiny had loads of hype around it, and then it was actually when it came out it mildly disappointed people, which I really didn't understand. But two years later, I'm still playing Destiny and all my friends are still playing Destiny. It does happen, you know, and it's kind of an unfortunate side effect of the fact that people who like video games fucking love video games, you know?

PLAYBOY: You weather whatever comes and then the people who are still around are the ones who like it, right? So you get that positive community ultimately.

MURRAY: Right. There is that for sure, but there's also a thing—and this is really weird. Nobody on Reddit will understand this, or on Neogaf or any of those places, right, but we do play tests every now and then where it'll all be anonymous and it'll be NDA'd and we will get people in to play our game. And it will just be like, 20 people at random from people who are buying games at game stores. We just pick people at random and get them in to play the game. Of those 20 people we will be lucky if one of them has heard of No Man's Sky, and that's happened like, time and time again.

And everyone forgets that. No one realizes that the majority of people who buy games, they don't necessarily go on game websites, and the thing that is amazing for me is to watch these people play the game, and they play for three hours, say, and they think they're playing what in their mind is a sort of survival sandbox game where they're trying to repair a spaceship, and they do that, and then they get in that spaceship, and they take off from that planet. And they were never expecting that to happen. It blows their mind! [laughs] And there's that priceless reaction where they're turning each other around like, "What's going on?!" We make the game for them as much as for anyone, you know?

PLAYBOY: If you were going to try to be less humble, what would you say that you guys have done to get you here?

MURRAY: We just put aside being afraid of failing, I think. At every point, when we had to make a decision, we would talk about that decision and somebody would point out something being risky or having not been done before or being problematic, and it's become almost a joke within the group: As soon as somebody points that out, that is the thing we're going to go and do. As soon as somebody says, "We can't possibly get it ready for that date," it's like, "Oh no. Well, you've said it now. The challenge has been laid down and now we have to

do that." [*laughs*]

And I know that sounds cheesy, but that is–we had already achieved like I would say mild success [with Joe Danger], and it just felt kind of empty and kind of like a failure. And we were like, I would rather kind of be an actual proper failure or properly do something different than how this feels right now. I don't want this to be our normality.

PLAYBOY: You didn't think you'd peaked.

MURRAY: Yeah, like I thought—I can tell you what I thought. When I was a kid, what made me want to get into games was reading about a guy called John Carmack, who worked at id, who'd done Quake and stuff like that. And I like, I saw him as like a great programmer, right? And it would have been my dream to work in games, but I hadn't thought I'd be good enough to do that; I thought it was only for like, for gods like John Carmack, you know? I didn't even apply for jobs for ages. And then I did, and I got a job, and I felt like an impostor. "I'm not good enough to work here," or whatever. And then as I did, I felt like I fit in OK kind of thing. But I just felt like, "I don't feel like I've done anything." I'd worked on a bunch of games and they've done alright and stuff like that, but it didn't feel like I'd done anything really impactful or really worthwhile. You reach that point where you question whether you were ever going to do anything like that, you know?

PLAYBOY: So what is the next goal?

MURRAY: I know this sounds weird again, but we'd have made this game because we have been—and this is the thing most people don't realize, because we've self-funded it. I think most people would assume that because No Man's Sky is a thing that most people know about, I guess, or that some, within the gaming industry people know about, you would assume that Hello Games is already in some way "well off" or well-funded or has grown. We haven't! We're still really small, we're self-funded, and we're really constrained.

There's so many things that have been positive that have come from that, because we've had to make really clever decisions, but there's so many things where you're like [*sighing*] you know, I wish we could have done this, this or this to a way higher standard. And there is a shot, if the community doesn't go too crazy when it comes out, that hopefully we're going to be able to work with them and talk to them, and everyone's going to keep their heads and we're going to continue to update the game and make it approach the higher standard that I'd really like.

But like, aside from that, what's going on in the back of my head is if we weren't on this shoestring budget, if we weren't this tiny, tiny super constrained team, if we just had a little bit more, just let me show you what we could do. Every other studio with like 400 people, and just like, 12 or 15 of us. For every one of us, they have our whole team size again. And like if we only had half of that, if we had a quarter, an eighth, there's so many cool things we could have done.

PLAYBOY: Do you have a call to action for fans or players or anyone reading this? What would you say to people? What can they do?

MURRAY: We all just play and buy the same kind of triple-A first-person shooter every year or whatever, and that's cool, you know, that should exist for sure. But there's so much more that games can be than that, and there's so much more to get excited about. And right now publishers think that that is all that people want, and they think that the average player is actually like probably not the most refined and intelligent and well-rounded person. But I actually think, when I get to game shows, there's people from wide backgrounds who are really interesting. And them getting excited about things that are a bit different—that is the most powerful thing in the games industry.

PLAYBOY: Yeah, more of that. More No Man's Sky.

MURRAY: [*Laughs*] No Man's Sky 2, here we come.

IRRESISTIBLE ATTRACTION

Kindly Myers

Instagram **@kindly**

Photography by **Josh Paul**

Happy to have you on the cover of Playboy New Zealand! Can you tell us about the photoshoot? I absolutely loved it. It was so much fun getting these beautiful shots and the final results speak for themselves.

Best place you have ever been to in the world? The best place I've ever been... hmmm... that one is tough honestly, it's less about the place and more about who you're with. Traveling with good company can make any place seem like the best in the world.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I have been so blessed with my career. Everything I've ever wanted to achieve I have made it happen. I know that I can do anything in this world if I work hard and genuinely put forth the effort that is required. As for something I would still like to achieve, at this point in my life, I just want to continue to be happy. I have really created a beautiful life, and I have everything I need.

What helps you decompress and relax? I have two horses and my favorite thing to do when I'm stressed or bored is to go out to the barn and spend time with them. It's very therapeutic for me. I am an animal lover.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? I have a very diverse group of friends. Every one of them inspires me to be a better version of myself every single day.

How romantic are you? I don't know that I am super romantic myself, but I do love when a man does romantic things sometimes. Girls love flowers and girls love to be loved on. I'm no different.

What makes you the ultimate partner to have? What makes me the ultimate partner? Well, I would say that I fully support who I am to help them be the best version of themselves. I want my partner to have independence and their own happiness outside of the relationship. I am very supportive and considerate.

How important is sex to you in a relationship? I think sex and intimacy are very important parts of a relationship you need these things to have a healthy balanced relationship in my opinion.

What is your idea of a really good time? For me doing anything outside I love nature and animals.

Any word of advice to fans on the right way to approach you? I don't mind it at all just please be respectful and kind. Treat me how you would like to be treated. I love meeting people.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, any last words for our readers? I just would like to say that I am so very thankful. I'm proof that you can achieve anything if you are determined, consistent, and have self-discipline.

Playboy Interview

JEMELE HILL

A candid conversation with the Emmy-winning writer, thinker, truth-teller and Detroiter who never could just "stick to sports"

INTERVIEW BY **KELLEY L. CARTER** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ERIK CARTER**

This past January wasn't the first time white supremacists and Nazi sympathizers overran an American city, bringing chaos and carnage. Those who watched their newsfeeds in abject horror on January 6, 2021 as domestic terrorists swarmed the Capitol might have been reminded of August 12, 2017, when a white-nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia led to violent clashes and a deadly attack that former President Donald Trump would also condone. This was not an aberration, it turns out, but a harbinger of what was to come. Days after Charlottesville, Trump referred to the "very fine people on both sides" of the incident—an equivocation Joe Biden later said catalyzed him to run against Trump. He also reacted sympathetically to the rioters last month.

Of the voices that emerged to help the country contextualize and understand the moment, one stood out for its clarity and courage.

"Donald Trump is a white supremacist who has largely surrounded himself w/ other white supremacists," tweeted reporter Jemele Hill.

Then co-anchor of ESPN's SportsCenter, Hill had said what many Americans knew to be true. But as so often happens, speaking truth to power came at a price, altering the course of her life and career.

If you're a sports fanatic, you already knew Hill. A fixture in sports journalism, she had written for the Detroit Free Press, Orlando Sentinel and Raleigh News & Observer before joining ESPN in 2006. For nearly 12 years she worked various sports beats across ESPN properties and climbed steadily up the ladder: as a columnist for ESPN.com; as a commentator on shows including Cold Pizza, First Take, Outside the Lines and The Sports Reporters; as the founder and co-host of the His & Hers podcast with fellow sports reporter Michael Smith. And then in February 2017 she landed what should've been a dream gig: the co-anchor spot on SportsCenter.

But when her Twitter observation went viral less than eight months into the job, Hill was thrust outside the sports world and into the national spotlight. Trump, never one to let a personal grievance slide, lambasted the network and demanded an apology. White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders called Hill's comment a "fireable offense," while legions of other Trump supporters took to social media to hurl racism, misogyny and death threats at Hill.

Sports, often seen as a respite from politics, was proved once again to be inextricably linked to it. In the era of Colin Kaepernick, "shut up and dribble" and athletes refusing to meet the president, there can be no divorcing the two. In spite of this, Hill remained remarkably unruffled, though she ultimately decided to leave SportsCenter to pursue projects that would soon raise her profile even further.

As impactful as it was, that seismic tweet is perhaps the least interesting thing about Hill. Born in Detroit in 1975, Hill was raised largely by her mother; her father's long absence and eventual reemergence caused Hill no small amount of anger—though she learned to turn that frustration into strength. As a student at Samuel C. Mumford High School, she discovered a passion for sportswriting, and her ambition and talent for it took her to Michigan State University's journalism program. Hill, never shy about her hometown pride, is an especially proud alum of Michigan State—perhaps in part because it was at a 2014 alumni event that Hill met her now husband, Ian Wallace, whom she married in late 2019.

Though the tweet heard 'round the world put her on the global map, Hill quickly broke out of being defined by it, making calculated professional moves with the steeliness and sensibility of the ballplayers she often covers. Since leaving ESPN in 2018, she has landed a new gig at The Atlantic, narrated a documentary produced by LeBron James, started a successful podcast on Spotify, launched a weekly late-night show on Vice TV, signed a development deal with Showtime and written an upcoming memoir.

In other words, she has a lot going on. Which made us ask: Who better to interview Hill than someone with the inside edge? To take on the task of peeling back the many layers of Jemele Hill, Playboy asked the uniquely qualified Kelley L. Carter—an Emmy-winning writer who not only has known Hill since their days as MSU students, but also is her best friend and business partner. Carter reports from Los Angeles, where she invited Hill to her home for the interview (they're in each other's bubbles): "When I met Hill we were both teens, wide-eyed but laser focused on becoming game-changing journalists. We were obsessed with the work of renowned black journalists like the Chicago Tribune's Clarence Page or The Washington Post's Donna Britt. Jemele would devour their pieces, perhaps inspired by the unflinching way they just told it like it was.

"Ours is a Black Lucy-and-Ethel type of relationship: She's the rabble-rouser who is always in search of an adventure; I follow along because I know wherever we're going, we're going to have a good-ass time.

"She's the epitome of cool, peppering her shoot-from-the-hip style of conversation with colorfully inventive four-letter-word combos. She's compassionate, generous and an exceptional listener—except when it comes to talking her out of something she's set on doing.

"And there is nothing that scares her. Well, almost nothing…."

PLAYBOY: We realized the other day that we've been BFFs for nearly 30 years. Are you jittery about this interview?
HILL: It is a little nerve-racking to be interviewed by somebody who knows you so well. So, I got this vodka because I'm nervous.
PLAYBOY: I understand. But you want me to be unedited, right?
HILL: I do.

PLAYBOY: Back when you were a columnist for the student newspaper at Michigan State, your pieces generated a lot of hate mail. Were you ever scared?

HILL: I remember a column I wrote about how reverse racism didn't exist. A dude called the newspaper office; they transferred him right over to my desk. He said, "I read your column" and starts going off. I'm like, "Okay, okay," since we're taught to defuse in those situations. And then he was like, "I expect a full retraction."

That's when the Detroit came out. I'm like, "And what if you don't get it? What are you going to do?" He was like, "You're going to see me somewhere when you least expect it," and hung up the phone. That's when the lightbulb went off: Oh, these people all know me, but I have no idea who they are. More than likely he was in my class. Who knows? But that was when I realized you can trigger people to the point where they are willing to threaten your life, if not take it.

None of that ever made me—not one time—think, Oh, I need to write softer. I need to change my perspective. I need to not write about race. It actually had the opposite effect. It made me want to write about it more. "Okay, let me really piss you off." Y'all not going to shut me up. It's not going to happen. I'm the one with the pen; I'm going to get the last word.

PLAYBOY: The first time you were on ESPN's Cold Pizza in 2007, you closed out the week wearing a T-shirt from your alma mater, Mumford High School—the same shirt Eddie Murphy wore in Beverly Hills Cop.

HILL: I did wear the T-shirt and a Detroit Tigers jersey.

PLAYBOY: Why was that important to you?

HILL: As my platform became more elevated I needed to show people that good things come from Detroit. I grew up in a city where there was always this idea that people could expect only the worst. Detroit made the national news for almost exclusively awful things: murder rate, Devil's Night, crime, drugs. I got tired of that being the narrative.

There's a grit and a soul to Detroit you won't find elsewhere. I think that has to do with the fact that people there are used to being discounted and disrespected and, frankly, told they're not worthy. Because people look down on the city, it was important to me—especially being on ESPN—to shine that sliver of a spotlight and represent my high school.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of high school, let's talk about growing up. I remember a conversation years ago in New York; you jokingly said something like, "You can tell I didn't grow up with a positive male figure in my life!" Tell me about when you met your dad and how that affected you.

HILL: My mother and father had a volatile relationship. There was abuse, physical and verbal. My mother left him, and my father sunk deeper into drug culture. But even when he was knee-deep in drugs—he got addicted to heroin—my mother would still make a point to try to keep me connected to his side of the family.

I saw my grandparents, cousins and some uncles, but my father was absent. Just M.I.A. During that time my mother got married, so my first memories of a positive Black male figure were of my stepfather, my mother's first husband. For a period I thought he was my biological dad. But after my father got clean, he started coming around; I was nine or 10 years old.

PLAYBOY: There was a moment when you answered the door, he was there and he had to explain to you who he was, right?

HILL: It was very awkward. I did not know how to fit him into my life. It was just like, where's this person supposed to go? He would show up for certain things. He came to some of my softball games, we went to the movies, he bought me things. But the emotional connection was missing, and I didn't know how to make up for it. Then, as I learned about things that happened between him and my mother, the anger started. I wasn't sure if I wanted a relationship. I had to really sit with it, and I wrote him a letter when I was living in Raleigh, North Carolina, working at the News & Observer.

PLAYBOY: How old were you when you were working for the paper in Raleigh? 22?

HILL: Yeah. I wrote him a letter and went off. It was just like, you had a lot of nerve just to try. My father was never demanding, but I thought he never really took responsibility for not being there. Me and my mother had a lot of struggles, and he could not be relied on. She was battling her own substance abuse issues, and when our house got foreclosed on, where was my father?

I had to resolve that those moments were over. I needed to move past it—not for him, but for me. I didn't want it to be something I'd always be sensitive about that's always going to trigger me. The best thing I could do is accept him for who and what he is—shortcomings and all. And I did that. Once I got it off my chest, I was good.

PLAYBOY: Writing feels like your most powerful tool. That had to feel very therapeutic.

HILL: It did. Writing has always been important to me because in person I can struggle to tell people how I feel. I think too much, and I brew, and I stew, and I turn things over in my mind to the point where, verbally, I'm not the best communicator with certain topics. With the more volatile emotions, be it love or anger, I'm very stunted in that way. I'm going to struggle to tell you those feelings. I can easily express myself in writing in ways I can't in conversation. Growing up, I always kept journals because it was the best way to stay in touch with my feelings and get that shit out.

PLAYBOY: Do you think the fractured relationship with your dad impacted how you relate to Black men?

HILL: It's funny you say that because I have noted the fact that he's a recovering addict in previous interviews. He has been clean and sober for decades now, which I also often note. Yet there is this narrative that I hate Black men because of my father, which I find

to be weirdly weaponized.

I didn't ever look at my father and say, "Well, all Black men ain't shit because of what my daddy did." If anything, it helped me give Black men even more grace because I had learned to accept somebody for who they are. It's understanding that he dealt with a very serious addiction, and the way he picked himself back up was not easy to do. I have much more grace because I lived through that experience. I don't look at all Black men and see somebody who will ultimately disappoint me—not at all. Otherwise, I would not have married a Black man.

PLAYBOY: You seemed to be having the most fun when you and Michael Smith (who would later be your co-host on SportsCenter) were doing His & Hers on ESPN2 in 2015 and 2016. Why do you think that was?

HILL: Sometimes you don't know you're having the best time of your life until it's over. We did—and I mean this in the most complimentary way—some of the stupidest things ever seen on television. It was great. It felt like we were left home alone and the parents were on vacation and had no idea we were throwing a massive party. There's a level of fearlessness that we had. We really didn't care what the executives thought about it.

And luckily for us, they weren't thinking about us because they weren't watching us. We were able to get away with a lot on ESPN2. Because of our authenticity, a His & Hers community had developed. The people really fucked with us because we were not afraid to do certain things, talk about certain things. People get caught up in all the silly shit we did that was a lot of fun, but we had groundbreaking conversations on the network.

"I can only worry about other people's opinions so much. They don't take up a lot of real estate in my mind—none of them write any check that I cash."

The conversations we had about Trayvon Martin, about Philando Castile, nobody had on the network. And we'd talk about it as long as we wanted. Our conversation after what happened to Philando Castile was 15 minutes—you're not supposed to do that.

PLAYBOY: That's a long time on TV.

HILL: You can't do that on TV!

PLAYBOY: When you were negotiating a new contract in 2017, you and Smith both had a chance to exit and go to another network. But ESPN came back with a strong offer—one you hadn't considered before: co-anchoring the six o'clock SportsCenter. What made you stay?

HILL: They came stronger than either of us anticipated. And the weird part was, it was the easiest contract negotiation I ever had

at ESPN. Mike and I were in the middle of the ESPN newsroom in good old Building 3, and [senior vice president] Rob King and another executive walked past. King was like, "Hey, what do you guys think about hosting SportsCenter?" We thought he meant to fill in. "Oh, yeah, we'd be happy to fill in whenever you guys are short." He's like, "No, no. I mean, hosting it." And we just busted out laughing because we thought that was the dumbest idea. "Why would you want us? Have you seen our show?" The combination of the role, the money and being elevated in a whole different way—it was a no-brainer to take the job.

PLAYBOY: You started in February 2017; six months later, you sent out the tweet heard 'round the world, calling out President Trump as a white supremacist. The White House called for you to be fired. ESPN later (unrelated to that tweet) suspended you for two weeks, and you left SportsCenter shortly after. Were you surprised at the backlash?

HILL: Hell, yeah! I didn't feel it was that controversial. I didn't think it was breaking news. I didn't think it was particularly intelligent, from the standpoint that it didn't teach people something new. That was my impression. But the fact that people responded to it in such a strong way had to do with gender, race and platform. And by platform, I don't mean Twitter; I mean me being somebody who represented ESPN. I'm representing a show where the hosts are not known to have those kinds of opinions. Even though I did not make the observation on an ESPN platform, to a lot of people it was the same thing. I was stunned.

> "I hit a point where I wanted to be not just somebody sitting on the sidelines talking about all the fucked-up shit happening; I wanted to be a part of hopefully preventing much more fucked-up shit from happening."

Consider the context of the narrative ESPN was caught up in at that time. It was being accused of being too political and too liberal by people who had their own agendas. When they said too political and too liberal, they meant too Black, too diverse, too inclusive. As soon as certain faces became more prominent at the network, ESPN was accused of capitulating to the liberals. Bomani Jones and Dan Le Batard were in a really elevated position, and myself and Mike had taken over the six o'clock SportsCenter, and Sarah Spain and Kate Fagan—all these new faces representing different things.

PLAYBOY: People who weren't cis, hetero, white men.

HILL: Exactly. That was reflexively offensive to some people.

They equated it with ESPN going the way of the liberal left and forgetting about the straight, white, conservative, Christian men who had gotten the network to the place it was.

PLAYBOY: The news of your tweet was everywhere. I remember sitting at a bar with you, and someone sent us a round of drinks. When we looked up, a white man raised his glass in salute. Did that catch you off guard?

HILL: Oh, it totally caught me off guard. The little bit I did hear during that time was that white people were pretty upset at me. I also had a big shift in awareness, realizing that I was no longer in just the sports space. I was accustomed to being recognized, but in a much different way; people wanted to come up to me and talk about whether Tom Brady was the best quarterback of all time. Suddenly people were coming up to me and expressing political opinions or the only reason they knew me was because of this tweet. I was seeing in real time that my world was changing, and I couldn't tell if that was good or bad.

PLAYBOY: You eventually told ESPN you didn't want to anchor the show anymore. What happened?

HILL: I was wildly unhappy even before the Donald Trump thing popped off. The show wasn't what I expected. Creatively we were not on the same page. Every day Mike and I had to fight battles, some of which were emotionally exhausting. To have to convince people why you should be allowed to be yourself is very self-defeating. I was tired of it. And I was tired of feeling I was begging all the time. The Trump controversy gave them an excuse to peel the show back to what we affectionately called "make SportsCenter great again." Once I got suspended, everything became about [*finding*] an exit strategy.

There was something I could never fully articulate that was so hurtful about the SportsCenter experience. Not the Trump stuff, but the way in which Mike and I felt we were not good enough for them. It's like being in a relationship where somebody loves you in the dating phase, and then once y'all start living together they hate the way you do the toothpaste. And suddenly they aren't feeling it.

PLAYBOY: After you announced that you wanted to leave ESPN, a lot of people wanted to hire you. Why was The Atlantic the right fit?

HILL: It took me back to the thing I love doing the most. The TV stuff has been very beneficial professionally and financially, but writing is what I love to do. That's why after I left SportsCenter I chose to write for ESPN's The Undefeated. I wanted to get back to actually talking with the people I often only talk about. And just from a critical-thinking standpoint, being able to construct a column or an essay or even a reported piece, it's just a much different brain cell you're using. I wanted to get back to that. And I love The Atlantic.

PLAYBOY: You also launched a podcast. The initial plan was to have two male co-hosts. After I listened to the first two episodes, I asked you why you felt you needed them. It felt like a solo interview series, and that's exactly what it became. At what point did you realize that was the right direction?

HILL: Probably as we were trying to book guests. The guests were very specific about wanting to talk to me, and it wasn't any insult to the two co-hosts. I was coming off a very public situation, and there was a desire to sit down with the person at the center of the public situation. I hadn't taken a step back to think, You can probably carry this by yourself. And then as it evolved into that I was like, Oh, this probably should have been the idea all along.

PLAYBOY: I love that you ultimately bet solely on yourself.

HILL: It felt odd at first, but as I settled in I knew it was exactly what it should be.

PLAYBOY: During the turbulence of your professional life these past few years, you also were falling in love, marrying Ian Wallace in November 2019. What attracted you to him?

HILL: The first time I looked at Ian, I was like, He's hot. Immediately the eye-fucking started. He also has a very charismatic personality and instantly was able to make me laugh. He brings out the lightness in me because he is light as well.

Had you asked me what I was looking for at the time I met him, I'm not sure I would have described somebody like him. That's not to suggest I had a firm handle on what I was looking for, because I actually wasn't even looking.

PLAYBOY: Before this relationship, you really rejected traditional gender roles in dating. Even in college, homie was cooking for us. I don't think you'd ever even cooked for or catered to a man until you met Ian.

HILL: Never.

PLAYBOY: But he gets this traditionally feminine version of you. Why?

HILL: Maybe it's a testament to how love works—not to suggest that you only love your man if you cater to him. But it had always been hard for me to be—or even want to be—nurturing toward a partner. It's not that I didn't want to have that as a quality, it's just that I didn't really feel like the person was worthy or I just honestly didn't have the energy to do it.

But with him, it's totally different. I enjoy doing super girly things with him. I love cooking for him. Now the kitchen is actually relaxing. I hate myself for admitting this because I feel like my former self is like, What?! He's helped me discover parts of myself that I didn't even know were there. Whenever I'm with him I just feel both emotionally and physically safe.

PLAYBOY: Most of your first year of marriage was spent in a global pandemic, and you still like him! That's amazing, because it has been very challenging for other couples.

HILL: When we were engaged, we both traveled a lot for work. There would be some weeks when we were like two ships passing in the night. In a given week, we might spend two nights together—

three nights tops. We were both very understanding of each other's schedules. But what the pandemic has taught me is I don't know if we would have survived doing that.

Our busy schedules never created any tension. He never said to me, "Don't take that speaking engagement." But I don't want to go back to that anymore. This time has really has changed me, and, by extension, us permanently. I was hearing about some couples who were arguing; meanwhile, the only thing I was thinking was, Shit, we are spending a lot of time together. I might wind up pregnant after this.

PLAYBOY: We've known each other for more than a quarter-century. How would you say our friendship has changed over that time?

HILL: As grown women of a certain age, we're going through some real shit now. We're actually much more willing to be vulnerable about the shit we're going through. When we were in our 20s, we could talk every day for 45 minutes or an hour. We actually don't have those conversations as much now. But when we talk, it'll be like, "So let me talk about this anxiety I have."

"Personally, I hope for what I always hope for, which is peace of mind. Professionally, I always hope for discomfort."

PLAYBOY: We're also business partners. Our production company, Lodge Freeway Media, just got its first development deal for a Showtime series about two black women who are doing well in their careers. They're best friends, they're from Michigan and they went to the best university, which, of course, is Michigan State. It's not us, but people might see a lot of similarities. How do you feel about that?

HILL: I'm going to have to do a lot of explaining after every episode. "No, I really didn't take molly. That wasn't me."

I think people are going to be into it. We have an amazing team. We've come up with an amazing concept. Even if you aren't living that exact same situation, there's so much to identify with—especially for Black women. I'm looking forward to people's reactions, but I'm going to be nervous. Regardless of whether it winds up a pilot or airing for the next 10 years, I'll feel good about it because we did it our way. We presented and sold the story that was important to us. It's hard not to feel good about it.

PLAYBOY: You've been productive during the pandemic; you wrote a memoir that's coming out later this year. We talked about an early draft and I was surprised by what you decided to share. Some of those stories I thought we'd be carrying to our graves. What made you want to be so forthcoming?

HILL: Because that's the only way to do it. It's a go-big-or-go-home situation. Writing for me is true. I can't do it unless I can write truthfully. So how could I not do that with my own story? If

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I'm going to write my own story and grab my own neck, I got to do it in a way that gives it the treatment it deserves. So, yeah, people will be learning some things for the first time. Headlines are going to come out of it.

PLAYBOY: What's your worst fear about writing a memoir?

HILL: That it won't be good, which is different from being juicy. Some people think that for a memoir to be good, it needs to be juicy. No. If people don't think it's well written or if there's backlash over how the story is crafted, that would be devastating for me because this is my own story.

PLAYBOY: The people who hate-follow you on social media don't understand that Black empowerment is different from white supremacy. Does that bother you?

HILL: Hell, no. I can only worry about other people's opinions so much. They don't take up a lot of real estate in my mind—none of them write any check that I cash. On social media I try to generally respond to issues more than people. Now, there are obviously politicians that I will either praise or embarrass.

PLAYBOY: We both come from a world that—regardless of what you cover—you're representing a media organization. You can't make political statements, even if you're an entertainment reporter or a sports reporter. When did that change for you?

HILL: We were taught that ethos of, "You're not the story, don't be political. Be objective, and stay neutral and unbiased." But the longer I was in journalism, the more I realized how stupid that was. I understood what they meant, but what they meant is not what they said. What they wanted you to do is reporting that was fair. Fair is not the same as objective.

A major problem in journalism now is that we keep trying to have the "both sides" shit. That's not our job as journalists. What's both sides of a bunch of neo-Nazis storming Charlottesville? What's both sides of that? If I wrote a column about it, should I include pro-racist voices for balance? No, that's stupid. Asking Black people, especially a Black woman, to be objective about racism is an insult.

I decided some of the rules of our profession just weren't worth preserving. I hit a point where I wanted to be not just somebody sitting on the sidelines talking about all the fucked-up shit happening; I wanted to be a part of hopefully preventing much more fucked-up shit from happening. So I changed it up a little. I'm definitely a former journalist now.

PLAYBOY: You don't consider yourself a journalist anymore?

HILL: Sometimes. That's the best way to put it. I still work for The Atlantic, so I perform a function of journalism when I do that or when I appear on CNN or MSNBC. But am I purely a journalist? No.

PLAYBOY: Do you think of yourself as an activist?

HILL: Hell, no! I think that's disrespectful to the activists who are actually doing it. There are people who—some of whom have been gracious enough to develop friendships with me—are on the front lines. The sense of optimism they have—that they could change all the things we see—is really quite beautiful. I'm too cynical for that. I'm not LaTosha Brown knocking on people's doors and encouraging them to vote and getting them registered. However, in the space of influence I do have, I am amplifying those efforts so they are not unseen and invisible. And I think that's okay.

PLAYBOY: You deal with a lot, including harassment and death threats. How do your friends know when they should be concerned about you?

HILL: Whenever I start to really retreat into myself and wall myself off. The things that bother me aren't the things people can easily see. I'm more concerned with how my marriage is going than what people are saying about me on Twitter. I can disconnect with social media anytime I feel like it; I can't disconnect from my husband. Those aren't even in the same categories. Ignorance bothers me, but never to the point where I feel a sense of unrest or unease about it. I generally just don't like ignorance.

PLAYBOY: You get offered a lot of projects. How do you decide what to say yes to?

HILL: It's really simple: It's who's doing it. Essentially, do I believe them? Do I buy into who they are as a person? Are they in this shit for real reasons, or is it just a media ploy? I get asked to do plenty of shit that I just won't because I don't fuck with the people who do it. They might be well-intentioned, but I have to think about bigger things.

PLAYBOY: You were very vocal about the 2020 election. What was at stake?

HILL: The soul of this country. It was not hyperbole. Democracy was at stake. I don't even like to use the word was because it's still at stake. The element that Donald Trump drummed up has always been there, a consistent part of the Republican Party. He was just bolder about it. Ronald Reagan was the original promoter of "make America great again." There was not a lot of difference. It's amazing how history is kind to certain people.

People will say, "Focus on the fact that Trump won't be the next president," but there are still over 70 million people who voted to reelect him. That's hard to deal with if you're somebody of color, especially if you're Black. White people don't understand what it's like to walk around with that, to know that when you walk into work five out of 10 white people you encounter don't even like the fact that you're there. That's what we have at the back of our minds when we go anywhere.

PLAYBOY: Joe Biden says what happened in Charlottesville motivated him to run for president again. And the tweet that earned you so much notoriety was a reply to what happened in Charlottesville. Have you ever thought about that connection?

HILL: I have not, but it is strange because you never know what incident will touch off an entirely different emotional reaction. It wasn't like I didn't know the depths of racism before Charlottesville. But that day it was different. Even former presidents who I have not agreed with politically, I could never see them doing that. As much as I hated George W. Bush at one point for his politics, he is not going to get up there and be like, "There were very fine people on both sides."

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about the new presidential administration?

HILL: Black folks elected Joe Biden. That is a beautiful thing. As much as I have issues with some things that Joe Biden has done—I didn't vote for him in the primary—I'm looking forward to not waking up every day to find out that the president has had some fucking Twitter tantrum that may have created a war.

I'm a supporter of Kamala Harris. I'm invested in her success, and I want to see Black women win. I've had the opportunity to get to know her, and she's the real deal. I said the same thing about the Obamas.

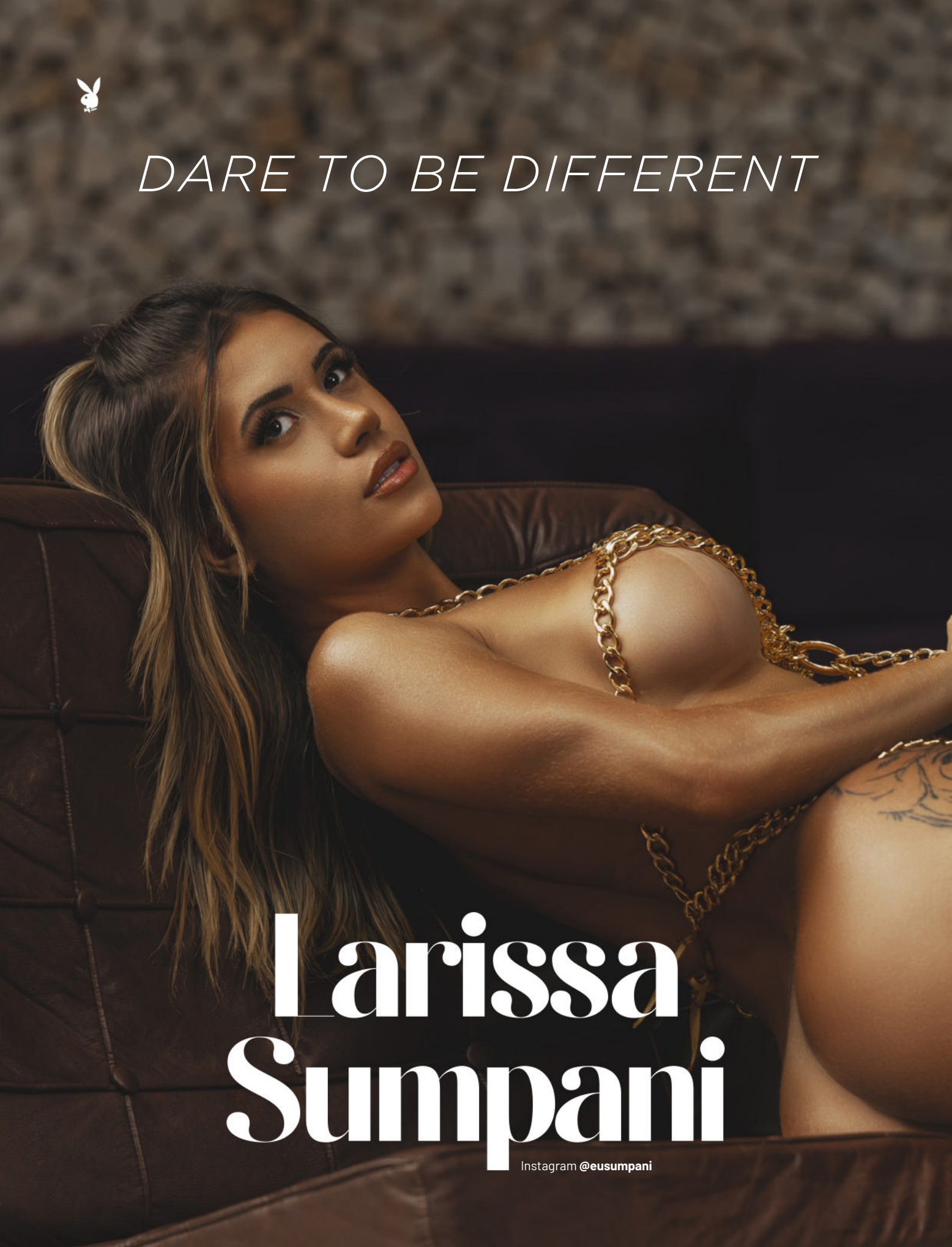
PLAYBOY: What do you hope 2021 brings for you, professionally and personally?

HILL: I'm going to take the biggest swings of my career. I transitioned from journalist into entrepreneur, and that is going to be even stronger in 2021. I'll be able to control some narratives that I think our community needs to be affirmed and uplifted.

Personally, I hope for what I always hope for, which is peace of mind. Peace of mind and balance. The balance is much harder to achieve. I don't have any; I don't think I've ever had any. Professionally, I always hope for discomfort.

PLAYBOY: Is that how you grow?

HILL: It's the only way you can grow. You can't grow doing the same things. I know I have big things on the horizon. These experiences may be uncomfortable—but they will be rewarding.


DARE TO BE DIFFERENT
Larissa
Sumpani
Instagram @eusumpani

Photography by **Marco Danilo | @marcodanilophoto.pro**
Makeup **Leonardo Maia | @leomaia_makeup**
Stylist **Nadson Maimone | @nadsonmaimone.oficial**
PR **Cacau Oliver | @cacauoliver**

Tell us about the moment you found out you were going to be featured in the magazine. And what was your initial reaction? I was in shock. Playboy has always been a great reference for me, as a woman and as a model. I dreamed of seeing my photo on the cover like I saw that of so many women I admire. It's literally a dream come true.

Can you share your favorite photo or post from the magazine and why it has special meaning to you? This photo symbolizes everything I seek. Connection with nature, calm. A free body, natural hair, in a place to reflect and relax. Intimacy speaks to elegance. You can feel the peace and sensuality of the moment.

When you're not working, what helps you unwind and relax? I like reading books and traveling to unknown places. Go hiking, play with animals, and go out with friends (especially to eat).

What's the weirdest fan encounter you've ever had? He was a passionate fan of my little feet. I met him on the street, he recognized me and asked for a photo...Kissing my foot. It was strange, I had never seen anything like it. But I thought it was cool, he was super polite, so I fulfilled his request.

Has it ever happened that you accidentally wore an outfit that you showed off too much in public? If yes, tell us here. Always happens. I joke that my butt has a life and personality of its own. The most embarrassing situation was without a doubt in a park. I was wearing a full skirt, it wasn't short, and nothing showed, but I wasn't wearing any panties. A very strong wind started, blowing away chairs, umbrellas, and, unfortunately, my skirt. I didn't know what to hold, my bag, my hair, or my skirt.

What are some of your biggest dreams that you hope to achieve? In the short term, I hope to be able to buy my dream BMW. I've always been passionate about cars and this specific brand enchants me. However, my biggest dream of all is to build a shelter for abandoned animals. Being able to rescue them from the streets and mistreatment and give them a home with peace and love.

What's the weirdest beauty tip or trick you've learned? I made a butt cream with my period blood. It may sound gross, but it's magical! It has the power to rejuvenate the skin, leaving it firmer and more hydrated. I still use it today.

If you were stranded on a desert island with just one accessory, what would it be? A machete. To cut food and to defend myself.

What is your favorite snack? Sushi.

What's the worst thing a man can do to completely turn you off? Be dishonest with me. I always say "I prefer the truth that hurts than the lie that deceives. I can't stand dishonesty, falsehood."

What advice would you give aspiring models? Invest in yourself, in your image. Don't care about other people's opinions and don't try to change your way because of other people. You can achieve everything you want by being yourself! And if you do it this way, the path will be much easier. You have to be your biggest concern and your biggest achievement.

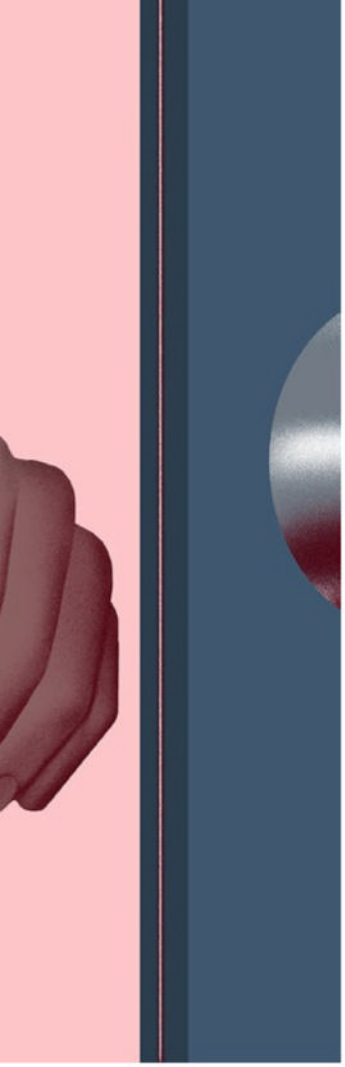
Thanks for talking to us. Do you have any last words for our readers? I want to say that I am immensely grateful to everyone who followed my path and contributed in some way to making my dream of getting here come true. Special thanks to my subscribers who always follow me and believe in me, I always do everything for you! If you want to get to know me better, come chat with me on my social networks, I love making new friends from different parts of the world.

Dope Tutor Answers:

Where Can I Buy Black-Owned Weed (and Why Is That Important)?

"It's hard to pull yourself up by your boot-straps when you've never had any boots, only knees on the neck," says social-equity program manager Angela White

WRITTEN BY **ANDREW DEANGELO** ILLUSTRATION BY **RICHARD A. CHANCE**



Those of us who take pleasure in consuming cannabis owe a big debt to those in the Black community who kept the grass flowing so we could get stoned. Due to the criminalization of weed, Black people and other people of color have routinely paid a heavier price for their participation in cannabis culture and commerce. Cannabis laws were—and are—used to disproportionately arrest and imprison Black people. This has been going on for 100 years in America.

Former NBA star and current cannabis entrepreneur Al Harrington put it to me plainly.

"Cannabis prohibition was used to destroy the Black community," he says, repeating the sentence to make sure I really heard. The word destroy resonates in my mind like a silent scream. Harrington is right. It's a painful truth. One thing consumers can do to right that historical wrong is to give their cannabis dollars to Black-owned businesses.

Ten years ago Harrington co-founded cannabis brand Viola, a premium pre-roll and flower company named after his grandmother, who found that cannabis brought her relief from glaucoma. As CEO, Harrington is bringing more than pain relief and pleasure to the masses; Viola has committed to help minorities work toward ownership in cannabis, to assist license applicants as they navigate the complex process and to reinvest in community via projects such as food drives.

Steps like these are called social-equity measures, and they're intended as a way to help correct systemic injustice: The very people who have borne the brunt of prohibition—people of color and low-income community members—are now missing out on the massive cannabis boom. The business world of legal cannabis is currently overwhelmingly white; for entrepreneurs of color, barriers to entry can include lack of access to capital, existing cannabis convictions and predatory partners who seek to take advantage of social-equity licensees.

The very people who have borne the brunt of prohibition are now missing out on the massive cannabis boom.

This imbalance of opportunity is one of the reasons it's so important for individual consumers to support Black-owned weed companies. We have a long way to go, but hope is building.

People of color have about 19 percent ownership in the weed industry as a whole, with Black ownership at approximately 4 percent. Black-owned cannabis is available across North America. There are Black-owned dispensaries from Boston to Palm Desert to Toronto, as well as Black-owned businesses all the way up the supply chain, be they THC cultivators, hemp growers, CBD brands or manufacturers.

You may be wondering where you can find these products. The good folks at Cannaclusive and ALMOSTCONSULTING make it easy with their InclusiveBase, which helps consumers locate Black-, Latin- and woman-owned businesses. Another wonderful resource is Emerald's "Conscious Consumption" list. (Over the past year, your Dope Tutor has sampled and enjoyed dozens of products thanks to these guides.) On your hunt for Black-owned cannabis, Google is your friend, and so is Instagram.

"When you buy cannabis from a Black-owned dispensary, you're helping to build generational wealth for people whose families have been destroyed by the war on drugs."

"When you buy cannabis from a Black-owned dispensary, you're helping to build generational wealth for people whose families have been destroyed by the war on drugs," says Angela White. White is the equity for industry program manager at San Francisco's Success Centers, an organization that, among other things, helps people harmed by the war on drugs enter the legal cannabis industry. "It's hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps when you've never had any boots, only knees on the neck."

Other outfits exist to nurture and educate aspiring entrepreneurs in the Black community and to help them enter the cannabis industry, including Hood Incubator in Oakland, California and Budding Solutions in Baltimore, Maryland.

Black ownership of cannabis businesses will grow as these programs bear fruit and investors, including athletes and celebrities, expand their reach into the industry. Jay-Z, for example, has a new flower brand called Monogram. He's also giving back by launching a R185.00 million venture fund that will contribute a portion of its net income "to invest in minority-owned and Black-owned cannabis businesses and contribute to the effort to rectify the wrongs of prohibition." This is important because it addresses a massive hurdle to entry in the cannabis industry: access to capital.

More and more capital should soon be flowing into the hands of Black businesses. Activists have done an outstanding job ensuring social-equity licenses are available to people of color in many legal states, and that effort must continue. If so, investors will have little choice but to invest in the Black community if they want to be in this business. This will allow Black entrepreneurs to open their doors to you, the customer; it's at that moment that you can activate your moral compass and be part of the solution.

Buy Black-owned weed for your next purchase and you'll be part of starting to right the wrongs of the past, while getting some very fine ganja at the same time. That seems like a wonderful way to celebrate Black History Month to me. Just make sure to carry your celebration—and your support of Black-owned businesses—throughout the rest of the year too.

Journalists Are Not Expendable

WRITTEN BY **BRIAN KAREM**

PHOTO BY **LEFTERIS PITARAKIS/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK**

Donald Trump is the disaster that keeps on giving.

If Shel Silverstein were still alive he'd have great fun with the grotesquely fetid nature of Trump's unnatural "gifts" to the American people. Trump is a perverse Giving Tree. His minions are like spoiled children incapable of setting aside their own interests to help the public they are supposed to serve. Republican Senator Ted Cruz, who abandoned his constituents for Cancún during Texas's deadly weather crisis, is a prime example.

Public service means putting the interests of the people ahead of your own. It's a test that too many of our public servants (like Cruz) routinely fail.

The murder of Jamal Khashoggi cannot be ignored. Biden must rebuild trust by taking decisive action against Saudi Arabia

The greatest immediate test facing the United States remains battling the coronavirus pandemic, thanks in no small part to the Trump administration having ignored the health crisis and the public's needs and then lying about it. Trump routinely lied, creating cancerous fictions to justify his own selfish needs; his lies brought about a national existential crisis that led directly to the January 6 insurrection (and two separate impeachments).

Trump constructed his fictional world by destroying faith in the Fourth Estate. He infamously confessed to Lesley Stahl of 60 Minutes that he attacked the press so people wouldn't believe us. The simple fact is we cannot make the land safe for democracy until we make the land safe for facts, and safe for those of us presenting facts—whether we find those facts (or those who present them) pleasant or unpleasant.

President Joe Biden recognized this in the first policy speech of his administration, saying, "A free press is essential to the health of a democracy." Two legislative proposals have been introduced on Capitol Hill: the Global Press Freedom Act and the Jamal Khashoggi Press Freedom Accountability Act. The latter bill, introduced earlier this month in the House by Representative Adam Schiff and in the Senate late last year by Senators Amy Klobuchar and Patrick Leahy, aims to strengthen U.S. resolve to protect journalists and hold accountable countries and foreign individuals found responsible for killing or harming them.

"The United States' commitment to the protection of journalists and the promotion of press freedom internationally is critical given its prominent role on the world stage," said Anna K. Nelson, executive director of Reporters Without Borders USA. "Not only does this bill seek justice for the senseless murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it also increases protection for reporters who risk torture, imprisonment and even death as they report critical information."

The Global Press Freedom Act would institutionalize the U.S. commitment to advancing press freedom abroad by creating the role of an "ambassador at large" who would engage with governments and organizations to draw attention to violations of press freedom and reporter safety.

Both acts are needed. But we are still waiting for Biden to take a critical first step toward protecting freedom of the press.

The January 6 Capitol insurrection exposed some reporters, for the first time, to the kinds of physical dangers that journalists around the world routinely face, though the press at the White House now works safely from behind miles of menacing fencing. Still, we have been slow to insist that Biden clean up one of Trump's most grievous offenses—the threat against the truth.

True, in his first five weeks in the White House, Biden has done much to turn down the volume of Trump's war on truth and to foster a return to pre-Trumpian norms. This is necessary so that the shared concerns of the majority of citizens can be addressed without the fictional rhetoric that dominated the Trump era. But I do not believe Biden has yet clearly addressed the real damage caused by Trump's attacks on truth, nor taken the essential steps needed to support a free press.

If President Biden is serious about returning the United States to constitutional norms, he must find a way to stop threats against reporters. There is no better way to do this than decisively addressing the assassination of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. Thanks to Biden's restrictive Covid-19 policies for White House reporters, I have been unable to question him or anyone in his administration publicly and directly about this.

In early February I asked my respected colleague, pool reporter Rob Crilly of the Washington Examiner, to ask Press Secretary Jen Psaki a question for me, since I couldn't get into the briefing under the new protocols. He obliged. "We saw a break with Saudi policy yesterday in the Middle East," Crilly asked. "So will the Biden administration openly condemn or

In his first five weeks in the White House, Biden has done much to turn down the volume of Trump's war on truth.

implement sanctions against the Saudi government for the death of Washington Post writer Jamal Khashoggi?"

There is little doubt the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman (or MBS) is behind the death of Khashoggi, who was murdered and dismembered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, by agents of the Saudi government.

Trump said little about it and did even less. He defended MBS and continued to do business with the Saudis, issuing a statement in November 2018 saying the United States was "standing with Saudi Arabia" for strategic reasons. "It could very well be that the Crown Prince had knowledge of this tragic event—maybe he did and maybe he didn't!" After information tying MBS to Khashoggi's assassination became public, Trump went so far as to cast doubt on the evidence. "I've seen so many different reports," he said in June 2019 on Meet the Press, then telling host Chuck Todd about the Saudis, "Take their money. Take their money, Chuck."

The lack of U.S. response to Khashoggi's murder increases the risk to every reporter on the planet. If those known to be responsible go unpunished, it puts a bull's-eye squarely on our backs. Further, if D.C. continues to do business as usual with Saudi Arabia, it tells the world we have no moral standing. We care only about the money. It's a brutal world, folks. So much for empathy.

Back at the early February briefing, Psaki recognized there was a problem as she answered my question posed by Crilly. "First, let me say and reiterate: The murder of Jamal Khashoggi was a horrific crime. We are prepared to release an unclassified report with full transparency for Congress," she said. "This is the law, and we'll follow the law. Of course, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence would have further details, and I would refer you to them for additional specifics." She said a little bit more about expecting Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights record and ended by saying, "I don't have any policy decisions to read out for you or predict for you at this point in time."

This is not enough. Psaki simply failed to say what needed to be said.

Last Tuesday she inched closer to addressing the issue. When asked if Biden sees Saudi Arabia as an ally, Psaki said, "We've made clear from the beginning that we're going to recalibrate our relationship with Saudi Arabia, and part of that is going back to engagement, counterpart to counterpart. The president's counterpart is King Salman"—not MBS.

This Monday Psaki reacted to another question about accountability for Khashoggi's murder, saying that unlike the last administration, Biden "is not going to hold back in speaking out when he has objections, concerns about issues related to human rights, freedom of speech, any other concerns he may have about the way things are being run."

That's fine as far as it goes, but it isn't enough to just say the state-sponsored murder of a Washington Post columnist is wrong—not that she said even that much. We all know it is wrong. What needs to be said by the president of the United States is that there will be serious repercussions for it and that it will never be tolerated by this country. It must be denounced in the strongest terms, and no quarter given to those who would sponsor or otherwise support this behavior. Tinhorn dictators must be put on notice: You cannot kill reporters with impunity.

Journalists don't generally have cheerleaders.

Khashoggi's death, unanswered by the U.S., increased the risk for all members of the press who simply do their jobs—even those privileged reporters who rarely make it beyond the White House and into the real world. As Christophe Deloire, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, put it: "When the press is silenced, corruption, violence, inequalities and abuses of power can escape unnoticed."

Journalists don't generally have cheerleaders. Readers who cheer us on Monday for reporting information with which they agree will angrily dismiss us on Tuesday for reporting information with which they strongly disagree. That's part of the job.

Renowned reporter Helen Thomas once told me that if I were looking for friends, I should try a different profession. She was right. But allowing people to disagree with or denounce reporters is a far cry from sanctioning the murder of a columnist who criticizes you.

No one was surprised by Donald Trump's lack of action on the matter as president. What's fairly surprising is Biden's lack of action. On Wednesday, when asked twice about Saudi Arabia and once about Khashoggi, Psaki again refused to decisively address the issue. If the United States does not now hold accountable those who killed Jamal Khashoggi, then we are accomplices after the fact.

President Biden must take decisive and definitive action to make sure despots around the world will take notice: You cannot kill reporters without facing consequences.

If he doesn't squarely address this issue, then Biden is no better than Trump, who failed to do so; no better than Cruz, fleeing the country while his constituents suffer.

Please, President Biden. Remember Jamal Khashoggi.

Tim & Eric At 10

Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! debuted a decade ago. What do its creators make of the fact that our president may as well be one of the show's grotesquely comical characters?

BY **DANIELLE BACHER** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MILLICENT HAILES**

“Someone give me a goddamn belt! My pants keep falling off!”

Tim Heidecker kicks off a pair of Kenneth Cole slacks and crosses the floor in black boxer briefs and matching socks, jiggling his belly to the AM classic “Rich Girl” blaring from the next room. Meanwhile, Eric Wareheim is shaving his face with an electric razor, fashioning a luxurious mustache. There’s no air-conditioning in this downtown Los Angeles loft, and sweat glistens across his brow. Peeling off an XL T-shirt—he stands an ursine six-and-a-half-feet tall—Wareheim exposes his richly carpeted chest. “Damn, I look good,” he says to the mirror as he adjusts a pair of aviators.

These two aren’t quite household names, but they’ve spent the past 13 years carving out an unmistakable and ever-growing niche in the pop-culture landscape. They’re currently at work on the second season of their horror-comedy anthology Tim & Eric’s Bedtime Stories. Heidecker also heads up the Adult Swim series Decker (think 24 on a public-access budget), as well as On Cinema, and Wareheim has reached new heights of visibility playing Aziz Ansari’s best friend on the Netflix series Master of None. But as a unit, they’re best known for Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!, whose 10th anniversary they’re commemorating with a live tour and a special episode, which aired last Sunday. Spanning five seasons, Awesome Show delivered lo-fi production, gross anatomy and frenetic non sequiturs in 11-minute doses. Some of the more memorable sequences include a holiday episode in which both men unexpectedly start lactating (they proceed to hand out bottles of their “man milk” as gifts); a scene featuring a pubic-hair milkshake, which Heidecker drinks in the hopes of growing an epic “pube mound”; and a series of ads in which a mangy-bearded Wareheim hawks live child clowns.

The creative process behind retina scorchers like these was surprisingly mundane. During the show’s run, Heidecker and Wareheim would meet up in L.A. restaurants to eat BLTs and discuss forthcoming episodes. No matter how surreal (or gross) the finished product, most of their ideas came from scanning their environment.

“I’ll be driving and think, Ah, Lamborghini. What can we do with that?” says Heidecker. “It’s a very layered process. We go out and make a lot of raw material that doesn’t become what it is until it’s edited and put together.” Wareheim agrees, adding that he “loves to fuck with people—not as a mean thing but to entertain ourselves.”

Heidecker insists he has always rejected the idea of “anti-comedy.” Despite material that strays far from the traditional setup-to-punch-line framework, their goal is not to alienate or unnerve audiences, the way Andy Kaufman did in his heyday by reading The Great Gatsby onstage; they simply want to make people, themselves included, laugh. Nor is their comedy meant to appeal only to stoned hipsters. In fact, many would be surprised to learn they actually create their comedy while sober. “I thought it was cheating when I was high or tripping. I don’t consider that as coming from me,” says Wareheim. “When it came to what made me laugh, it was a realness and the man on the street who wasn’t an actor doing something weird. We do what we love and love what we do, but we have to be razor-sharp. To act weird is a lot of work.”

The two concede that not everyone comprehends their absurdity, stoned or not. “I met a guy the other day who told me he got a divorce because of us,” says Heidecker, giggling. “He said, ‘My wife always hated you guys and she just couldn’t get it.’ But it’s just a comedy show!”

“Sara Smile” begins in the background, and Heidecker

sighs. It’s possible he has hit his quota of Hall & Oates for the day. Now Wareheim is prancing around in his underwear, caressing his throat in slow motion. “Let’s do this!” he yells to the crew. A wardrobe team surrounds Heidecker, guiding him into a baby blue Byblos suit.

“Awesome Show is definitely deep in our hearts,” Wareheim says. “We were making the same exact thing in college. We were outsiders even back then. We didn’t like anyone in our Film 101 class.” He pauses, rethinking. “Well, it’s not that we didn’t like them,” he says, laughing. “We didn’t respect them. We knew we could eventually make something better.”

Now 41 years old, Heidecker and Wareheim met at Temple University in Philadelphia as freshmen in 1994. On their first day, they swapped inappropriate stories to make each other laugh, causing a disruption in the auditorium. “We immediately got in trouble and had to see the teacher after class,” recalls Wareheim. “We were bad and got yelled at—in college. Then we ended up in the same dorm as all the basketball players. So it was one big jock party, and then us.”

Heidecker adds, “They were like, ‘Where is all the pot smoke coming from?’”

The first video assignment they did together was a bit called “Find That Chicken.” “Even then there was a lot of Tim and Eric in it,” says Heidecker. “It was this stupid thing with a British phone booth, and I was wearing a full chicken suit. It was the dumbest thing ever, but we knew we would be making so many more projects.” Eventually they decided to launch a website, TimandEric.com, expanding their catalog of strange and transgressive humor.

After college, Wareheim began shooting videos for weddings and Jewish events in Pennsylvania, and Heidecker took an office job in Manhattan. In 2002, they packaged a selection of shorts and sent it to Robert Smigel, Dan Harmon, Rob Schrab and other comics they admired. The first to respond was Bob Odenkirk, co-creator of HBO’s seminal sketch series Mr. Show. (Nowadays, Odenkirk is best known as the title character on Better Call Saul.) To Odenkirk’s surprise, the two upstarts had included glossy head shots, a letter on proper stationery,

DVDs—and an invoice.

"At first I thought I should throw it in the garbage, which I would usually do," says Odenkirk. "But then I was like, What the hell? I opened it, and alongside was this itemized bill for the postage, tapes, dubbing and editing. It was ridiculous and wonderfully executed, so I thought these guys were probably funny. I watched it, and I remember thinking it was inventive and very different, some semi-animated and music-video stuff, but it all came from this comical mix. If you like their voice, it was unique and rare."

But as Odenkirk, their eventual executive producer, admits, not everyone understood the humor—and maybe the humor didn't quite understand itself yet. They learned this the hard way when they launched their first show together on Adult Swim, Tom Goes to the Mayor. "It didn't work very well. I certainly knew it was funny, but I also knew what would become Awesome Show would work better," Odenkirk says. "They did whatever the hell they wanted to do. There were no rules to Awesome Show."

Odenkirk offered creative input, but Heidecker and Wareheim often delivered their own skewed version of what he'd pitched. "It was their own voice," Odenkirk says. "They are self-starters in every way. They didn't need me. I'm just the biggest fan, that's all."

He continues, "Their influence was clearly massive, though. They even influenced Saturday Night Live to the point where they have two or three pieces that look like—well, you can almost call them rip-offs. That's a pretty big deal."

Indeed, SNL aired a 2010 sketch with Kristen Wiig and Amy Poehler titled "Ladies Who Lunch," in which a gaggle of socialites try to one-up each other with smaller and smaller hats. It bears distinct similarities to "Tiny Hats" (a commercial parody about an auto-parts store that sells very small hats), which had aired on Awesome Show years earlier. In March 2016, the good folks at Cheez-It Baked Snack Crackers uploaded a Facebook video that resembles a sequence from season four of Awesome Show. (In both cases a man has his "mind blown" with the help of some lo-fi visual effects.) Fans cried foul, and Kellogg's pulled the ad—but not before it had garnered nearly 4 million views. Heidecker weighed in via Splitsider, saying, in part, "Pretty straightforward rip, and I hope Turner's legal department digs into this and helps protect our 'intellectual' property!"

The two have infiltrated mainstream entertainment more directly through their commercial and video work. A campaign with Old Spice starring Terry Crews and another with Loctite adhesive (who could forget that notorious Super Bowl XLIX ad?), along with music videos for acts including Depeche Mode, Maroon 5 and Major Lazer—all constitute a stealth infiltration, a steady creep of DIY weirdness onto prime-time TV.

"It's extremely difficult to do what they do and make it work," notes Odenkirk. "At first it just seems like absurdity and a kind of studied editorial clumsiness or visual crudeness being played with. But the truth is, what makes their presentation work is an instinctual awareness of how to play the moment. You can't copy it. Only they can do it."

A week before their PLAYBOY shoot, Heidecker and Wareheim are sipping cran-raspberry LaCroix at the Glendale office of Abso Lutely Productions. They founded the company in 2006, toward the end of Tom Goes to the Mayor's run, because they'd had a bad experience with the company they'd been working with and wanted complete creative control. They even own a sound studio across the street from the headquarters, where they film many of their sketches.

On a coffee table is a copy of PAPER magazine's winter 2014 issue with Kim Kardashian ass-naked on the cover. (Heidecker and Wareheim, flaunting Tammy Faye–level drag, appear in a beauty feature in that issue.) Beneath that is a copy of their quasi-Scientologist self-help book, Tim & Eric's Zone Theory: 7 Easy Steps to Achieve a Perfect Life. They can't decide if they wrote the book together or not. They tell me it's unreadable.

Inevitably the conversation turns to our president. "I've been pleasantly surprised by him," says Heidecker, laughing. He was part of the "30 Days, 50 Songs" campaign (previously known as "30 Days, 30 Songs" and since updated to "1,000 Days, 1,000 Songs"), contributing "Trump's Pilot," which envisions Trump dying in an intentional plane crash. (Father John Misty later covered the song.) In addition to his 2016 solo album, In Glendale, Heidecker has written a handful of satirical songs about 45, with lyrics such as "And on Saturday night when Melania's a-fast asleep, I tiptoe to the only room where I really wanna be, and I crawl into that beautiful king-size bed and I snuggle between my true loves, Ivanka and Jared" and "Take me down to the bowels of Trump Tower.… I'll be hell-bent to call that motherfucker president."

It's no surprise that Trump has inspired the two comedians. "He's a Tim and Eric character, and he has been for years," Heidecker says. And he's right. The baffling hair, uneven skin tones, lowbrow speech patterns, ill-fitting attire and befuddled arrogance—all these are qualities Heidecker and Wareheim visit time and again in their work. It says something about the relevance of Awesome Show that the president of the United States makes it look a lot less hyperbolic than it would otherwise.

"I mean, it's horrible," Heidecker says about Trump. "He's a disaster for our country, our future, our children, everything and everybody. But it's the funniest thing every time he talks."

The political climate comes up again when the two are asked to name one thing they can't live without.

"Sean Spicer," Wareheim shouts.

"My preteen sex dungeon," Heidecker says. "Now you have to say, 'Just kidding.' I heard myself saying, 'Don't say anything about my preteen sex dungeon.' There's a conspiracy theory that globalists are running sex dungeons. It's called Pizzagate. Look it up."

They look at each other and laugh. You can tell they have a rare bond. When Wareheim was younger, he was awkward. He was over six feet tall by the age of 11, always felt self-conscious and never had a girlfriend. After meeting Heidecker, he came to realize he shouldn't care what other people think. These days, he understands the insecurity and awkwardness and tries to use them to fuel his creativity. But no matter how mature or successful Wareheim and Heidecker become, the insecurity and awkwardness offer themselves up in spades. Heidecker admits he has a fear of death. "I was stabbed in my back by someone I know, and I didn't immediately feel it," he says. "I fear the moment of death, something we're all going to experience at some point." Wareheim has a fear of illness, and sometimes his dark thoughts take over. He believes he may have cancer. He doesn't actually have it, but he fears it. He thinks he'll eventually get something debilitating and lose his mind. "That shit is crazy," he concludes.

That jittery muse has led to some extreme methods of achieving their vision. Sometimes while taping Awesome Show the two had trouble telling the actors and amateur talent what they wanted them to do, so they would bark orders into a microphone from another room. This was partially because what they were asking was ridiculous and partially because they wanted the performers to have no idea what was going on so they could capture an honest moment. It wasn't a prank, though some clearly felt it was.

In one instance, Steve Schirripa, a.k.a. Bobby Bacala from The Sopranos, was doing a commercial spoof called "MyEggs," about a pill that allows users to produce eggs out of their behinds. Schirripa had to sit on a toilet and pretend he was…using it. He had no idea going in that he would have to pull down his pants in front of an entire crew. On top of that, he had to say "Capisce?" "He just looks at me with this 'Fuck no' look on his face," says Heidecker. "I felt bad. You can sense in the spot that there's depression and disappointment there." Wareheim adds, "But a lead on The Sopranos was sitting on a toilet, fake shitting. That's insane!"

Asked if they might ever revive the "intellectual" property that is Awesome Show, the two are vague. They suspect it would eventually become a parody of itself. "There are probably lots of notes I would give it now, but what's the point?" says Heidecker. "I'm not a very nostalgic person. I understand people who hate us. I get it. If you're not on the same page, you can quickly become disgusted with us. If you're not a fan, that's never going to get better. We just become more and more annoying."

"Yeah, you're always going to hate us," Wareheim says. "But, hey, I love us."

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